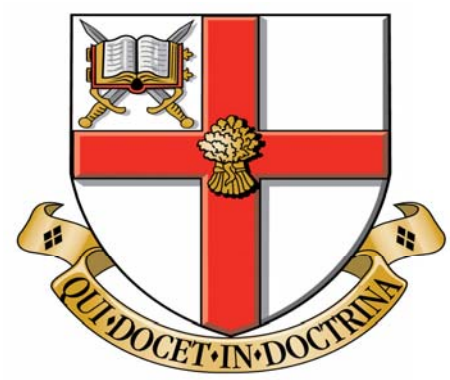

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Author(s): Ruth Mary Bridges

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‘Fragile Worlds’

A Literature-based Heuristic Exploration of the Experiencing of Presence Within the Person-centred Therapeutic Encounter.

Ruth Mary Bridges

Dissertation submitted to the University of Chester for the Degree of Master of Arts (Counselling Studies) in part fulfilment of the Modular Programme in Counselling Studies.

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Abstract

The quality of presence has been widely researched within the realms of both nursing and psychotherapy during the last two decades and yet would appear to continue to challenge our contemporaneous predilection for the more measurable and contained. Through heuristically informed literature-based research, the author examines facets of the personal, professional and spiritual dimensions of presence, offering an investigation of its experience and influence within the psychotherapeutic encounter. The study identifies five key aspects of presence and offers a discrete analysis of these, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the essential fluidity of the phenomenon. Co-creative elements of presence are emphasised incorporating recognition of the mutuality of encounter, alongside a consideration of presence as offering. The significance of the self is identified and the study concludes with a reflection on existential and spiritual dimensions.

Within much of the literature presence is perceived as deeply therapeutic. Conversely, this research suggests that, whilst presence may clearly retain the capacity to support emotional and psychological growth, it may also possess the potential for harm. It is argued that, as therapists, we might offer our presence with care, guarding against a somewhat indiscriminate 'holding' and accompaniment of clients. The main implication is to training wherein the author argues that further attention might be paid to understanding the impact of the 'self' within the moment of meeting. Written from an existential-humanistic stance, this study concludes that however elusive presence may initially appear, it offers itself for a considerable degree of analysis and thus proves itself worthy of more focused attention during initial training and beyond.

Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Signed: ..... (Ruth M Bridges)

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My gratitude to those who patiently supported my exploration and lovingly bore with my struggle toward a fuller understanding of this most elusive of concepts.

Thanks particularly to:

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……

For John and Charlotte for their unwavering love and support throughout a most difficult year

For Mark with whom I have shared so much of this journey

…and for my clients with the deepest gratitude for the privilege of encounter.

Contents

'Tiffany reasoned that everyone had something inside them that told the world they were there. That was why you could often sense when someone was behind you, even if they were making no sound at all. You were receiving their 'I am here' signal.

Some people had a very strong one. They were the people who got served first in shops. Granny Weatherwax had an 'I am here' signal that bounced off the mountains when she wanted it to…

She could turn it off too.

She was doing that now. Tiffany was having to concentrate to see her. Most of her mind was telling her there was no-one there at all.'

(Pratchett, 2007: 30/31)

Chapter 1

Introduction

> 'The ground beneath presence is quicksand, its atmosphere shadowy. When I speak of the elusiveness of presence I am not thinking only of the idea of presence and how difficult it is to define, I am thinking also about the difficulties of practicing presence, of unconditional giving.'
>
> (Harper, 2006: 108)

'All presence has authority' reflects Harper, 'a force and radiance, unreserved and yet unpredictable' (2006: 4), and it is the potential force, radiance and unpredictability of presence I seek to examine herein. Through literature-based and heuristic research, I offer a qualitative study of presence striving to remain attuned to the 'meanings, nuances and dilemmas' inherent within this realm (Elliott & Williams, 2001: 181). Data from the spheres of nursing and psychotherapy highlight the therapeutic significance of the physical, emotional and spiritual communication of presence, and I thereby acknowledge both the extent of the professional debate and the demands of interpersonal encounter. As I worked to maintain an appropriate level of critical reflexivity, I discovered the degree of immersion required if I was also to remain true to the heuristic approach. Presence may elude us, but it becomes clear that our attention to the somewhat precarious reality of encounter may cultivate heightened levels of personal and professional awareness, considerably enhancing therapeutic efficacy.

Perceived variously as the offering of intimacy, depth and empathy with openness, sensitivity and maturity, it is challenging to consider what may be held within the precise, and perhaps somewhat precarious, moment of Buber's envisioned 'I-Thou' encounter (1958). Bugental defines presence as 'the quality of being in a situation or relationship in which one intends…to participate as fully as she is able…and through bringing into action one's capacity for response' (1992: 27). Presence may therefore be understood as our sense of self and/or another that encompasses, and yet also transcends, physical being, psychological

availability, emotional connectedness and spiritual resonance. Whilst the concept of presence is perceived as vague and 'difficult to delineate' (Smith, 2001), this research suggests that its manifestation within counselling holds the potential for both healing and harm.

I write from an existential-humanistic perspective and my decision to explore this realm emerged through a long-held striving toward aspects of the spiritual. As a child within the Christian church I was surrounded by images powerfully conveying the immanence and transcendence of a God present with, and to, His people. My eventual inclination toward mysticism, retreat and silence emphasised the significance of a more intangible awareness of presence, but it was my ultimate training within person-centredness that enabled me to sense the therapeutic potential of personal presence. The writings of Fromm (1957), Buber (1958, 1965), Rogers (1980, 1989), Nouwen (1994, 1997, 1998), Merton (1962, 1971), and Thorne (1998, 2002) have, amongst others, long inspired me to reach 'beyond' in my recognition of mystery, and an awareness of my own presence with my clients prompted me to begin a process of clear personal significance.

Much continues to change within the realms of counselling and psychotherapy, including a more generalised provision of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy within Primary Care and a continued compulsion to define, measure and assess both therapeutic efficacy and financial viability. A study of this genre would appear particularly pertinent at a time wherein discussion regarding regulation, core competencies, and graduate entry to training appears to dominate the professional agenda. This perhaps challenges our capacity to retain the intimacy of encounter and measures our practice against criteria that may have little to do with 'real human exchanges' (Vickers, 2006: 91).

Working within palliative care enables me to sense the significance of these 'real exchanges', for here we perhaps enter a realm wherein dominant discourse may be suspended enabling a profound recognition of our humanity. Whilst my professional concern is that we do not 'lose

the essential core' of our practice (Ellingham, 2000: 64), I acknowledge that my proclivity toward relationally deep encounter inevitably influenced the nature of the research process. 'Findings can only be found' asserts McLeod, 'by someone who is actively searching' (2001: 141), and the level of this searching was, at times, intense. My research urged me to reflect at depth on the place of therapy within the intricacies of our internal and external landscapes. Whilst the heuristic phases of engagement, immersion and incubation (Moustakas, 1990) demanded I attend with care to the intimacy of encounter, my review of the literature enabled me to comprehend the breadth of the debate.

The sense of presence that emerged was complex and multi-faceted. From an initial analysis of the potential impact of our personal presence (Chapter Three), I explored aspects of presence as gift (Chapter Four), the 'space between' (Chapter Five) and the significance of mutuality within the subtle negotiation of encounter (Chapter Six), ultimately offering a reflection on aspects of the existential and spiritual (Chapter Seven). Whilst clearly reflecting discrete facets of presence, each element of the debate retained a distinct fluidity. I am aware that the inherent elusiveness of presence, and the nature of my heuristic journey, fundamentally challenged the presentation of a more rigidly defined analysis.

As much as we may strive to analyse the nature of our therapeutic interventions, we need perhaps to return frequently to the mystery that exists at the core of our humanity. If 'speech cannot articulate the deeper truths of consciousness' (Steiner, 1989: 111), then my hope is that this research will point beyond itself, urging us toward a recognition of the ineffable, for it is perhaps the truths we hear in silence that ultimately possess the capacity to transform.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Philosophical Perspective

> 'Through the brilliance of an image the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me'
>
> (Bachelard, 1964: xvi)

I accept what McLeod has described as the 'interconnection of methodology, epistemology and ontology' (2001: 55); essentially how my understanding of the nature of reality and of personal and societal constructs of knowledge coalesce, profoundly affecting the methodological process. Morrow reflects on the 'entrenched ethnocentrism and colonisation of research' (2007: 220) of the last century and I wonder how this cast shadows over my process, for it is surely impossible to extricate ourselves from the values that have governed our moral, social and psychological worlds. As bricoleur, I attempted to 'negotiate my own route through the methodological terrain' (McLeod, 2001: 119) and if I was to remain true to the phenomenological approach, then I had to accept the multi-faceted nature of this process.

My sense of the challenges inherent within existential-humanistic psychotherapy combined to create a unique lens (Holloway, 1997) which inevitably held the power to distort. I acknowledged the vicissitudinous nature of our internal and external worlds and questioned my capacity to retain an appropriate degree of clarity within this journey. I would contend that there is an inevitable uniqueness within qualitative research, and this was a tension I was compelled to negotiate if I was to appropriately balance the living, evolving narrative of heurism with the academic rigour of a literature-based study. My role as researcher frequently demanded a level of objectivity and analysis that profoundly challenged my heuristic 'posture of indwelling' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 25).

Assuming a grounded approach to research, which necessarily emphasises an immersion in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), enabled me to attend more fully to the voices and perspectives of the authors reflected herein, whilst remaining 'sensitive to' their 'potential multiple meanings' (McLeod, 2001: 71). It appeared essential to hold an awareness of the power of culturally embedded discourse, not only on a cognitive understanding of the concept of presence, but on the way this may be interpreted and experienced. Language is of course 'never simply a system of labelling or naming' but a 'symbolic means of understanding the world' (Langer cited in Stanworth, 2006). The texts frequently came alive 'because the writer provided a stimulus' that resonated deeply within me (Bachelard, 1964: xvii), and I sought to remain as attentive to my emotional response as to intellectual debate.

My emphasis was not solely on understanding through focused attention (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) but on raising issues of professional relevance. This required that I attend to the nature and impact of my philosophical stance involving me in a continuous process of questioning (Malhotra-Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Whilst I remained acutely aware of the distinct phases of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), beyond my initial engagement and the emergence of my research question, I began to move in a somewhat cyclical manner through immersion, incubation, and illumination.

Through 'living with the topic consciously and unconsciously' (Atkins & Loewenthal, 2004: 507) I identified with Etherington's described sense of 'invasion' (2004b: 51). I sensed many processes at work and 'sought understanding from many voices' (Phelon, 2004: 344), generating a uniquely personal style of critical analysis. I recognised the significance of my openness, but also the inherent danger of becoming immersed to such a degree that I failed to perceive the more challenging or diverse nuances of this realm. I would contend however that I could not have been anything other than fully present within a study of this genre.

Data Collection

I was familiar with a certain amount of published work pertaining to this realm and although the texts of Buber (1958), Rogers (1980, 1989), Steiner (1989), Bugental (1992), Kahn (1997), Robbins (1998), Natiello (2001), Thorne (2002) and Yalom (2002) provided an appropriate foundation to my study, they clearly formed only a fraction of the available data. Whilst I was concerned for both breadth and depth, I recognised the boundlessness and fluidity of this sphere and was aware that my sample could become too large for it to be appropriately contained, resulting also in an overgeneralisation of findings (Penrod & Hupcey, 2005). There were always 'further layers to be excavated' (Steiner, 1989: 46), and although I applied specific parameters regarding theoretical stance and therapeutic approach, presence, as a phenomenon, did not respect the boundaries I was compelled to place upon it.

Data was initially accessed via the extensive PsycINFO database, and results were restricted to those in English. During the primary stages no defined date parameters were set for the intention was to become aware of as much research as possible. Preliminary searches yielded a significant range of results and it was clear that it would be possible to fail to access relevant data through an inconsistent or inaccurate use of terminology. The words *counsellor* and *therapist* were both used and truncated to ensure a comprehensive access to relevant works, and I employed the search terms 'couns*' and 'therap*' to access articles citing counsellor(s), counselor(s), counselling, counseling and therapist(s), therapy, therapeutic respectively.

An initial search of the terms 'presence' and 'therap*' within Abstract (AB) yielded 2,829 results and I elected to refine my search criteria to ensure a degree of manageability. I proceeded to use the same terms within Title only (TI) generating 201 results which were individually appraised and of which 35 were deemed potentially relevant to this study. Of these I elected to focus specifically on field-based research as opposed to published articles/books, and 23 appeared to be research-based, the majority of which were qualitative

studies completed within the past two decades. Using the terms 'presence' and 'couns*' within Abstract yielded 53 results, of which five were considered relevant, and a final search 'presence' and 'couns*' in article Title only, yielded two results. Of the 30 potential research documents, nine were deemed directly pertinent to this study.

An advanced search of the term 'presence' in Title through Google Scholar yielded 17,300 results; this was subsequently refined to 'counselling' and 'presence' within Title which yielded two results both of which appeared inappropriate to my research. The search term 'therapeutic presence' produced seven results of which five appeared highly relevant, these are included variously within this study. A further search of the term 'healing presence' yielded 25 articles of which 14 related to spiritual presence and a further three were clearly written from a medical perspective; of the remaining eight, two appeared highly relevant to this study. Whilst at this juncture I had not rigidly applied defined parameters regarding publication date, all research deemed appropriate to this research had been completed within the past 25 years, which would appear consistent with Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott's finding that 'it was not until Gardner (1985) that presence was identified and further expanded as essentially a psychophysical and psychosocial concept' (1996: 24).

A search of the University of Chester library, Google Scholar and the PsycINFO database also revealed a number of published books within the realm of therapeutic presence, and some of these were selected using the criteria employed for research articles; specifically those exploring the realm of presence from a psychotherapeutic perspective and, more specifically, those written from a humanistic and/or existential stance. A variety of published works within this area were already well known to me and had guided my original proposal, others emerged through my heuristic research journey. Whilst these were not used extensively within my research they offered a foundation upon which I was able to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under analysis.

The Cambridge Journals Online database was used to search to pursue a final exploration of this realm. Restricting the search to the keywords 'presence' and 'therap*', appearing in Abstract and/or Title, generated 19 results. The majority of these appeared as medical studies and were generally quantitative in approach. A further search of 'couns*' and 'presence' in Title only yielded a total of 25 results. In the main these referred exclusively to the presence of specific variables within the therapeutic process, as opposed to a consideration of presence as a distinct phenomenon, and were therefore deemed inappropriate to this study.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

I am aware that there is more literature available within the realm of presence and this study does not purport to be a comprehensive analysis; what is included however is representative of a significant amount of the literature, and was selected on the basis of the fulfilment of certain criteria:

- Does the text directly relate to the concept of therapeutic presence?
- Is the text written from or researched within the humanistic/existential paradigm?
- Does/do the author/s attempt to expound the concept of presence or is it an assumed phenomenon within the data?

For issues of manageability, to guard against overgeneralisation, and to ensure an appropriate degree of objectivity, it was not my original intention to access data beyond the realm of psychotherapy; however I discovered a number of highly pertinent research studies within the realm of nursing. Due to their direct significance to the psychotherapeutic encounter, I ultimately elected to include these and would contend that they provide an alternative and important dimension (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Fredriksson, 1999; Smith, 2001; La Torre, 2002; Finfgeld-Connett, 2006).

Whilst the majority of the literature was accessed via the search methods outlined, other extracts emerged through my personal immersion in the data; clearly a significant aspect of

the heuristic approach. Despite the personal and professional demands of combining literature-based and heuristic research, I would suggest that this unique synthesis helped to ensure a degree of balance, enhancing both validity and trustworthiness. It seemed appropriate, and consistent with the heuristic approach, to include my personal reflections as they emerged within my process and a selection of these form the Appendix to this study. Those I elected to incorporate within the text appear as pieces of poetry at the close of each chapter, and exist as highly personal and frequently amorphous responses to the more rigorously defined analysis of the literature offered therein.

Data Analysis

As I came 'face to face' with the 'presence of offered meaning we call text' (Steiner, 1989: 156) I met each script as I would strive to encounter client or co-researcher, actively listening to myself and the Other (Moustakas, 1990). This demanded that I remained aware of my professional bias and my personal inclination to be drawn to the existential whilst marginalising the more pragmatic. As I entered into analysis and reflection I became aware of the dominant discourses of the worlds of research and psychotherapy, and recognised that my capacity to comprehend the fullness of these landscapes held the potential to both restrict and enhance the scope and the credibility of this piece.

Through an interrogation of the texts (Kleining & Witt, 2000) certain themes began to present themselves which, as my process reached its central phase, facilitated a more appropriately defined analysis of the data. I identified key units of meaning within each (McLeod, 2001) until it became apparent that the data was saturated (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007; Finfgeld-Connett, 2006). Whilst different vocabulary was frequently being employed, and despite the occasional divergence of theoretical stance, it became clear that a consistent sense of presence was emerging.

Once no new themes were coming to the fore, the data was marked and common threads

highlighted. These initially fell into three broad categories relating to an understanding of presence as *offering*, *co-creation* and *spirit*, which upon more extensive analysis ultimately formed the five chapters of this study identified below:

- Self and Presence
- The Gift of Presence
- The Space Between
- Negotiated Being
- Existential and Spiritual Dimensions

With two notable exceptions, therapeutic presence was consistently envisioned as healing and conducive to growth. Only Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott (1996) and Cameron (2002) appeared to offer discussion regarding the potentially negative impact of presence. I carried this awareness into my process, developing an acute sensitivity to aspects of the unvoiced. Certain texts encompassed many facets of presence and appear variously throughout. Included also are briefer references from publications more indirectly related to the research phenomenon that emerged within the heuristic process of my research journey. Whilst these do not necessarily offer themselves for in-depth analysis, they provide pertinent reflections on the theme under investigation and, as Nuttall asserts, 'dependability is demonstrated by direct engagement with the text' providing an accurate and extensive 'audit trail' (2006: 438). However, in my concern to comprehensively represent the perspectives of the authors included herein, I wonder if the data becomes somewhat 'fractured' (Charmaz, 2000).

Partway through this period I found myself involved in a process of deconstruction, critically reflecting on some of the assumptions of the therapeutic encounter, particularly within the humanistic school. So if deconstruction 'invites a tentative, curious, deliberately naïve posture' (Sinclair & Monk, 2005: 342) this required that I adopt a position of considerable un-knowing. Whilst consistent with the heuristic process, this period of 'incubation' was

demanding, coinciding, as it did, with a time of considerable personal change. When I emerged, it was with a heightened sense of my own presence and a more critical sense of presence within the therapeutic endeavour. I was consequently compelled to abandon some of my beliefs regarding my practice within palliative care, and found myself experiencing a sobering awareness of my 'insufficiency' (Buber, 1958: 131).

Through undertaking a heuristically informed literature-based study I was clearly maintaining a dual process, for as I immersed myself in the data it was not only to identify key units of meaning (McLeod, 2001) but to discern my personal response to what was expounded therein. My journal (Appendix) enabled me to respond with immediacy and transparency to the data and yet it remained a profound challenge to hear it in its fullness. At times I felt compelled to abandon my heuristic process in order that I might pursue a more focused critical analysis. However, it became apparent that this was fundamentally impossible, for even when I believed I was participating in intellectual debate, my emotional response consistently emerged within supervision or personal therapy.

It was with a degree of trepidation, that I ultimately elected to trust this emergent process consequently holding externally defined criteria less rigidly. If I was to appropriately respond to my presence at the heart of this journey, then I would contend that this was both congruent and valid. I believe that it would have existed as a contradiction at the heart of the research process if I had continued to apply rigid boundaries to a dimension so intrinsically boundless. If 'the vocabulary of spirit' truly 'belongs to a language of depth', then perhaps this more fluid access of data permitted me to remain fundamentally open, enabling meaning to gradually 'unfold, rather than [present] itself for dispassionate analysis' (Stanworth, 2006).

Ethical Dimensions

Within literature-based and heuristic research it may be challenging to identify all the 'possible ethical dilemmas' (Grafanaki, 1996: 333) so it was important therefore to attend to

the more subtle aspects of the ethical debate, recognising that my duty of care extended not only to myself and to the authors I sought to represent, but to my clients who were inevitably impacted by my research journey. It was surely impossible for the process to remain static for 'human behaviour…evolves. It reconstitutes itself' (Laungani, 2004: 202).

It was vital for me to consider the wider counselling arena, accepting that I had an ethical responsibility to my colleagues and to the profession itself (Etherington, 2004a). As qualitative researchers, our ethical responsibility surely extends far further than our contact with co-researchers, the interview process or the ultimate presentation of data. This responsibility was present within my handling of data, how I prepared for and conducted my reading and the manner in which I reflected on previous debate. Spoken conversation holds an inherent fluidity, allowing us to respond with immediacy to the subtle nuances of encounter. I was compelled, therefore, to remain acutely aware of the partiality it may have been possible to perpetuate through the 'predetermined' and inevitably 'one-sided' nature of the 'text-reader conversation' (Smith, 2002: 35). I firmly believed that I retained an ethical responsibility to ensure, as far as possible, that any 'merging' of voices (Skeggs, 2002) was respectfully presented with commitment to beneficence and non-maleficence (BACP, 2003).

I recognised the uniqueness of merging literature-based and heuristic research and yet hoped that this synthesis would produce a 'rich narrative' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 46), of authenticity, creativity and depth (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). I acknowledged the importance of maintaining a balance between 'imagination' and 'scholarship' remaining acutely aware of the ethical and political (Elliott & Williams, 2001) within the debate. Although clearly not striving to be invisible as researcher, I questioned how I would most appropriately attend to the literature without my presence dominating and, significantly, whose reality I would ultimately be attempting to portray (Morrow, 2007). I was certainly striving to 'live' the research and frequently questioned how I was able to appropriately

manage my continued work with clients whilst ensuring adequate self-care during a time wherein my practice influenced, and was deeply influenced by, the nature of my journey.

I was committed to retaining a spirit of openness, acknowledging my desire for the design of this study to emerge as the research proceeded. As I 'listened' to the texts, I was very clearly listening to myself and whilst I was not striving to retain a state of 'empathic neutrality' (Patton cited in Grafanaki, 1996: 334), I would question the constraints of my own narrative on the emergence of a study of validity and authenticity. Despite my intellectual, emotional and ethical rigour I recognised the inherent fragility of such a process. Whilst I do not believe I held the assumption that there was 'an objective truth waiting to be revealed' (West, 2001: 128), I would question how open I was to truly being challenged by the data I accessed.

Validity

Within a literature-based study there is an inevitable fusion of reader and author, and whilst I would attest to the creative potential of such synthesis, I remained aware of my capacity to present a biased narrative. I would question how far I was truly able to retain a spirit of receptivity within my reading and how this inevitably, albeit inadvertently, limited the scope of this piece. I discovered as I read that meaning unfolded for me, and what emerged frequently moved, challenged or inspired, and it is perhaps our openness to being changed that ultimately enhances the integrity of our research findings. The data frequently appeared to act as a catalyst to the emergence of distinct questions regarding the universality of presence, the potentially negative aspects of our distinct ways of being, and the mystery and fluidity of the 'space between us' (Josselson, 1996).

I accepted the limitations of attempting to use myself 'transparently' within my research (Etherington, 2004a: 25), for not only might this have rendered me personally vulnerable it may also have prompted others to question the validity of the data. Adkins (2002), citing Probyn, reflects on the nature and form of the reflexive stance, examining the unquestioned

authority this can often assume, and arguing that it may be our concept of self within our reflexivity that may be flawed. It therefore seemed vital for me to attend with care to what emerged within the process of my research, owning my reactions and reflections (McLeod, 2001), whilst striving to understand what it was within my history and my personality that prompted such responses (Adkins, 2002). As demanding as this practice inevitably became I believe it considerably enhanced the validity of my research.

I was committed to 'striving for honesty' not only in my 'collection and analysis of data' but within my personal reflections wherein a 'commitment to transparency' (Bond, 2004: 9) seemed of paramount importance. I recognised that I remained central to the process (Grafanaki cited in Elliott & Williams, 2001), particularly within the heuristic aspect of my research wherein my personal journey assumed a particular potency. Frequently 'urged to speak from the depths of [my] being' (Moustakas, 1990: 36), I found myself pouring into my journal profound reflections on my developing process and it seemed that I would be obliged to 'live [these] questions for a long time before responding' (Burton-Christie, 2005: vii). I wrote knowing that much eluded me, and what I truly wanted to express frequently seemed to lose its essence in translation.

My personal understanding of presence clearly influenced my perception of the data, testing my capacity to hear challenge and contradiction and, as the process unfolded, I sensed the emergence of a distinctly 'different kind of listening' (Morrow, 2007: 228). Anything I attempted to present would 'inevitably leave silences' (Etherington, 2004a: 85), and whilst my concern was to offer a unique perspective, I accepted that this would be restricted by my level of professional awareness and my capacity to reflect on the heretofore uncharted within my own experience. I attempted to retain a spirit of mindfulness, sensing that this would hold the potential to enhance the trustworthiness of the study in addition to attuning me to the more intricate and less tangible facets of presence.

I was challenged to critically reflect not only on my capacity for change but on my willingness to fully attend to aspects of presence that may have emerged in opposition to any previous understanding. However, as much as I endeavoured to 'bracket' aspects of my personal experience, I recognised the inherent impossibility of completely freeing myself of 'presuppositions about the phenomenon being investigated' (Stubbs & Bozarth, 2006). I would also join Maykut and Morehouse (1994) in wondering at the true purpose of my study. Whilst my sense was that this emerged from my personal and professional concern for the more intangible aspects of therapeutic practice within an increasingly unpredictable social and political landscape, it was sobering to consider if it may also have been an attempt to 'validate' aspects of my own deeply held beliefs (Malhotra-Bentz & Shapiro, 1998: 52).

Limitations

'We can only think wisely' argue Esteva and Prakash 'about what we know well' (1998: 22), and yet what do we truly have the capacity to 'know well' if 'from the moment of our birth we begin internalising the only reality open to us' (McLellan, 1999: 330)? Where, within our various social and political worlds, might the individual truly find a voice and what, as a white, middle class therapist was it really possible for me to hear? It was unsurprising therefore that my listening seemed partial and frequently prejudiced and whilst my aim was to retain a significant degree of openness with regard to my selection and analysis of data, it was clearly impossible to eradicate bias. I questioned to what extent I might be equipped to quieten my inner dialogue but ultimately concluded that it was potentially the uniqueness of this self-narrative (Pedersen, 2000) that facilitated a more authentic acknowledgement of the perspectives reflected herein.

I recognise that the heuristic nature of this research retained the power to distort. I was concerned to remain fully engaged with the literature whilst remaining sufficiently committed to considering the journey in its entirety; this remained a multi-faceted and uniquely

demanding process. Many questions emerged regarding the nature of presence and it was my sense that whilst it may have been necessary to hold some of these in mind as I 'interviewed' the literature, I was committed to remaining as open as possible (Bond, 2004), and believed that these questions might have held the potential to inappropriately limit the data. Whilst I sought to maintain a spirit of 'heightened awareness' (Stubbs & Bozarth, 2006), I recognised that my 'passionate…commitment' (Moustakas, 1990: 15) to this realm might have anaesthetised me to the more subtle dimensions of presence, inadvertently limiting both scope and credibility. Within my selection and subsequent analysis of the data I unavoidably identified my limits, and would therefore question the extent to which my philosophical values may have prevented me from truly hearing the voices of the authors reflected herein.

'Heurism' necessarily required me to 'allow a period of incubation' (Etherington, 2004b: 58), and it was this incubation that demanded a 'preparedness and an ability to move between the worlds of the physical, the emotional, the cognitive and the mystical' (Thorne, 1991: 76), necessitating a full and deep commitment to the process (Bugental, 1992). The echoes of this were far-reaching and it became apparent that this profoundly challenged a more cogent presentation of the data. Whilst I accepted the importance of maintaining a balance between 'flexibility and consistency' (May, 1989: 180), this study rapidly assumed a distinctly amorphous quality. I wonder however if the essential fluidity of heuristic research, paradoxically perhaps, remains one of its profound strengths.

Engagement in a process so language bound inevitably frustrates, and it became my sense that this realm defies translation. What I offer herein is not an exhaustive critique of the literature pertaining to presence, but a critical and highly personal reflection on a substantial amount of the data as it emerged within my heuristic journey. Throughout this process, I recognised my deep commitment to discovering what it truly means to become 'worthy of the privilege of being invited into a human life at the depth that therapy requires' (Natiello, 2001: 25).

Chapter 3

Self and Presence

> 'We limit the scope of our responsibility primarily to the therapy appointment as we must…but if our responsibility must have limits and boundaries, within these it can still have great depth. We cannot always be available, but when we are, it is our capacity for true presence that does the healing.'
>
> (Bien, 2006: 18)

It has been suggested that 'for the existentially oriented therapist the use of self is an essential element' within the therapeutic encounter (De Witt, 2000: 56). Whilst the various theoretical orientations both demand and necessarily result in differences of perspective and comprehension of process, the universality of presence and the experiencing of its various manifestations clearly remain central. It is also surely vital to recognise that, regardless of theoretical stance, we 'are not only present…as roles but as unique persons' (Fredriksson, 1999: 1167). If 'therapeutic presence' truly demands 'bringing one's whole self into the encounter' whilst remaining appropriately 'grounded' in that self (Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 82/3) then it perhaps behoves us, as practitioners, to consider well the aspects of our selves that may most significantly impact the therapeutic space (Hoffman, 1996; Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Phelon, 2004; Reupert, 2006).

Much within the literature appears to consider the use of the more intangible aspects of the self (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Rowan, 2004; Craig, 2000; Phelon, 2004), and yet if we are to truly communicate our presence 'with' another then this may also demand an immediate, and perhaps transparent, 'being' within the moment of encounter (La Torre, 2002; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Cooper, 2005a, 2005b; Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006; Schudel, 2006; Spinelli, 2007). Whilst it would seem that self-disclosure is not essential to the experiencing or indeed the communication of presence, it *may* be a way of expressing our realness or our authenticity (Webster, 1998), as opposed to 'remaining opaque

and aloof' (Cooper, 2003: 72). And yet clarity of boundaries is also emphasised, for our offering of presence is clearly held in its own way with adherence to external boundaries of time, space and physical contact surely remaining critical to the appropriate and ethical development of the relationship (Feltham, 2007).

Black, Hardy, Turpin & Parry (2005) offer research regarding 'self-reported attachment styles' and their impact on the therapeutic alliance, and whilst it is clearly beyond the remit of this study to explore this potential correlation, it would appear relevant to consider what it is within our culture, history and personality that may influence our communication of presence. Self-awareness would appear crucial here, for it is consistently argued that we respond from our embodied sense of our clients; reacting to the physical, emotional and psychological within the encounter. Perhaps the capacity to attain and maintain a degree of 'inner expansiveness' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 80) becomes essential if we are to have the emotional and psychological capacity to use 'ourselves in the service of the Other (Craig, 2000: 269), offering a degree of internal space wherein clients may feel both heard and received (Fredriksson, 1999).

The employment of the 'whole self' would appear essential to an appropriate communication of presence, and Geller & Greenberg join others (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Fredriksson, 1999; Baldwin, 2000; Craig, 2000; Janecka, 2000; Cooper, 2003; Finfgeld-Connett, 2006; Reupert, 2006) in their recognition of the distinction between 'being there' (Janecka, 2000) and 'being for' the Other. To communicate personal energy (Cameron, 2004), to become 'vulnerable' or to 'lower our defences', suggests that our self is inevitably present (Finfgeld-Connett, 2006: 711). However Craig (2000) joins Rogers (1980, 1989), Natiello (2001), and Mearns & Cooper (2005) in his concern for the importance of 'bracketing' aspects of our own experiencing within our encounters with our clients. It is, paradoxically perhaps, through our capacity to hold a discrete sense of self that we may become more fully

and freely available (Hycner, 1993; Hycner & Jacobs, 1995).

The process of interpersonal encounter is clearly multi-faceted, and it would therefore seem accurate to conclude that bringing our 'selves' more completely into the relationship offers the possibility for enhanced levels of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual resonance. Bragan (1996) joins Rogers (1980) in exploring the personal presence of the counsellor, with 'authentic meeting' becoming the goal of the psychotherapeutic journey. Personal qualities are particularly emphasised within Geller & Greenberg (2002) and Reupert (2006), and Black et al, join them in reflecting on the 'attributes' of 'warmth, openness, flexibility, honesty' (2005: 366). The quality of our presence is consistently emphasised within the literature (Buber, 1958; Fredriksson, 1999; Janecka, 2000; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Thorne, 2002; Reupert, 2006) and we should perhaps consider well what it might be, within this presence, that holds the unique potential to be 'releasing and helpful' both in and of itself (Rogers, 1980: 129).

However, despite the assumed healing potential of therapeutic presence, we might be advised to accept that the 'vibrations' we inevitably transmit hold the capacity to be both 'vitalising' and 'destructive' (Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006: 125). Within palliative care I remain acutely aware of the physical presence of my clients, particularly as they undergo the exacting regime of chemotherapy. I frequently sense my own presence extending or withdrawing in direct response to their presenting fragility (Cameron, 2004), and as we together encounter aspects of our inherent vulnerability I often find myself 'deeply shaken' (Spinelli, 1997: 7). Craig's research reflecting presence as 'sanctuary' (2000) emphasises the potential of the therapist's capacity for 'attending' to the Other (Ibid: 268). So, how does our ability to attend influence how our clients are able to be physically and emotionally present with us, what they bring to us, and the ways in which they are able to articulate it?

Participants within Geller & Greenberg's study (2002) consider the impact of the conscious

use of self 'as an instrument' in guiding both awareness of and response to clients. Frequently they reflect on the use of what respondents describe as 'internal' or 'true self' within the encounter whilst experiencing a concurrent and perhaps paradoxical 'absence of self-consciousness' (Ibid: 79). Satir (2000) reflects on the significance of full presence within the psychotherapeutic encounter suggesting that the concurrent meeting of the deepest selves of both counsellor and client may be crucial to the release of 'healing potential' within the client (Ibid: 25). However Satir also emphasises the significance of our acknowledgement of our intrinsic fallibility within this meeting.

Within the offering of our presence it is suggested that we reveal, albeit often unconsciously, distinct aspects of our self in relationship, and are therefore necessarily required, to recognise our inherent propensity for both 'good and harm' (Forster, 2007: 31). By virtue of our humanity we surely retain the capacity to powerfully influence both process and relationship; bringing our 'personal qualities into the therapeutic environment' (Reupert, 2006: 95). Therefore despite our concern for non-directivity, particularly perhaps within the humanistic school (Levitt, 2005), it would perhaps be naïve to assume that it is possible to 'be there' at the level psychotherapy requires and not to profoundly affect the space within which we meet. Therapists occasionally reflected on feeling 'rising out of experience' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 79), prompting spontaneous and certainly 'unplanned' responses to clients. Whilst it would appear vital to recognise the potential danger of this, it seems that in working to offer true presence a fundamental trust in personal integrity often emerges (Thorne, 2002).

The literature suggests that if we are to become a 'vital presence' and offer a degree of 'sanctuary' then a sense of oneness with ourselves is essential. A 'transcendental attitude' is suggested (Craig, 2000: 268), utilising our 'transpersonal self' (Janecka, 2000; Rowan, 2004), which may offer both the depth of listening and fullness of presence variously envisioned by Buber (1958), Bugental (1992), Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott (1996), Schmid (1998),

Fredriksson (1999), Thorne (2002), Cooper (2005a, 2005b) and Schudel (2006).

A holistic sense of the moment of encounter, and an awareness of the wholeness of both self and client may facilitate both immediacy and transparency (Mearns & Cooper, 2005) and yet there is perhaps a fine line (Geller & Greenberg, 2002) between being intimately present within the moment of meeting whilst remaining sufficiently centred to offer an appropriately empathic and congruent response. The more we may perceive the self as a fluid process of becoming as opposed to a rigidly defined phenomenon (Rogers, 1980; Janecka, 2000), the more perhaps our personal and professional presence may manifest itself, and yet as Baker, Johnston & Wenner emphasise, this is 'not about being skilful, but being brave' (2006: 15) for it is encounter at its most profound and not technique we offer (Spinelli, 1997).

It engages me
I am taken in those moments
To a place beyond
Empathy, immediacy, transparency
Revealed through fear, compassion, frustration
Love
How is my presence?
Should I be here?
Can I not be?
Held in time
Our only and immediate reality
And can that be enough?

Chapter 4

The Gift of Presence

> 'Being fully present to another person is, however, of a different existential order, and takes the therapist into the hazardous terrain which inevitably opens up once there is commitment to being congruent and resolutely faithful to the flow of experience.'
>
> (Thorne, 2002: 68)

Presence as 'gift' is emphasised variously within the literature (Fredriksson, 1999; Craig, 2000; Hoyt, 2001; Thorne, 2002; Bien, 2006; Manthei, 2007), particularly within the humanistic school, but increasingly across all therapeutic approaches. I would question however the degree to which it is possible to ascertain an accurate sense of this phenomenon as the majority of research involves therapists as opposed to clients, for surely the *offering* of presence is qualitatively different to our *experiencing* of the same.

Humanistic literature frequently reflects on the challenge, demands and the gift of intimacy, and if we are held constantly 'in a process of becoming' (Perovich, 1998: 216), our interpersonal encounters might be seen as existing in an unremitting, and somewhat disturbing, state of flux. This may necessarily require a 'great deal of courage on the part of the therapist' (House, 1997: 327), also perhaps a deep trust in our own integrity (Thorne, 2002). It also becomes apparent that the self-awareness expounded in the previous chapter may be subsumed into self-forgetfulness as we potentially lay ourselves aside in our offering of ourselves to the Other (Bozarth & Wilkins, 2001; Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Establishing and retaining an acceptance of the wholeness of our clients would appear contingent upon both our awareness and our acceptance of our own wholeness (Fredriksson, 1999; Phelon, 2004). Hansen (2000) reflects on the importance of not reducing clients to what he terms psychic bits, and within our attending to their inherent wholeness some would clearly argue for an abandonment of technique and a certain transcending of role (Phelon,

2004). If then this offering is not held within role or technique, how might we begin to ascertain what it is we *do* offer as therapists and how therefore might our sense of Rogers' core conditions be appropriately envisioned to afford our practice the depth seemingly demanded (Finfgeld-Connett, 2006). Perhaps it is indeed something 'around the edges' (Rogers cited in Baldwin, 2000: 30), our presence in tangible form, that our clients really yearn to experience. As communicated consistently within the literature of the humanistic school, it is not ultimately what we *do* that instils trust, but how we *are*.

Webster (1998) clearly alludes to this in her presentation of client reflections regarding the significance of therapist realness. It could perhaps be surmised that the more authentic, congruent or 'real' we are within the encounter, the more our presence will be felt and the more open we may be to the presence of the Other. However, despite the fact that it is argued that 'this presence is not imposed', but emerges through our 'dedication to the client's…way of being' (Bozarth & Wilkins, 2001: 150), I would question if it is possible to be present with another without, to some extent, imposing our presence upon them. Whilst the therapeutic 'offering' of presence is frequently referred to within the literature (Bozarth & Wilkins, 2001), and despite the apparent profundity of such studies, my heuristic process urges me to question if we consistently fail to comprehend not simply the impact of our presence on healing and growth but also its potential for harm. I would argue that we assume its benevolence to the potential detriment of the client and the eventual demise of the relationship.

Interestingly, and perhaps disturbingly, the literature would appear distinctly silent here, with the positive dimensions of presence unequivocally dominating both established texts and field-based research (Buber, 1958; Rogers, 1980; Thorne, 1991, 2002; Craig, 2000; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Phelon, 2004; Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006; Schudel, 2006). If however we are to enhance the potential for healing and minimise the potential for coercion, control or abuse

(Pointon, 2007), it would seem that we may be required to hold an acute awareness of the inevitability of our being and the reality of our personal and professional power,

Research highlights the importance of offering a degree of 'holding and containment' (Holmes, 1999: 45), 'finding and using [our] centre' within our responding to our clients (Robbins, 1998: 21). Manthei's study reflects the significance for clients of feeling 'comfortable, listened to and heard' within a relationship wherein they clearly believed themselves to be 'accepted' 'welcomed' and 'understood' (2007: 6). Geller & Greenberg (2002: 76) identify certain distinct stages of presence; *preparing, process, experiencing,* concluding that presence may involve the cultivation of a spirit of *being with* as opposed to *doing to* the client, emphasised also by Fredriksson (1999). Critically perhaps, this clearly demands being present in a manner that 'transcends the adoption of professional role or the application of technique' (Phelon, 2004: 347).

Full presence is perhaps demanded of the counsellor at the level of the transcendent (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996) or transpersonal (Rowan, 2004), envisioned by Sherwood as 'intense beingness' demanding 'concentrated energetic availability' (2001: 2/10). Although it is frequently argued that our presence may encompass Rogers' core conditions, we surely offer aspects of ourselves beyond empathy, congruence or positive regard. Geller & Greenberg (2002) propose that it is our *embodiment* of the core conditions that constitutes true presence; honouring our own humanity and the humanity of our clients (Hansen, 2005). And yet, however committed we may be to the communication of empathy and congruence (Rogers, 1980, 1989; Mearns & Thorne, 1988; Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Mearns & Cooper, 2005, Mearns, 2006) there will surely be occasions wherein a self-protective retreating will be inevitable (Hansen, 2005).

It becomes clear that although the literature reflects the complex and delicate process of working therapeutically with immediacy and transparency (Mearns & Cooper, 2005), it

appears impossible to comprehend the true nature of our being within such an insubstantial realm. The subtle essence of our spirit may extend or withdraw within the moment of meeting (Cameron, 2002, 2004) and our way of being will indeed 'change over time' (Phelon, 2004: 348) for we surely do not exist as static entities. However, it would seem that a degree of constancy within what might be termed our attentional presence may be conducive to creating a 'space where the [client] can be in deep contact with her suffering' (Fredriksson, 1999: 1171), and within which significant healing may occur. This constancy may perhaps be communicated through a certain stillness or quietness of spirit (Thorne, 2002) or be held in our capacity to 'not do' (Phelon, 2004: 348).

Despite an apparent abandonment to process, self-awareness would seem to be necessary if we are to communicate our empathic and congruent responses in ways that are not only accurate, but sensitive to the person and the presence of our clients. If we are to 'monitor the extent' to which we are able to 'engage in an empathic understanding' (Sinclair & Monk, 2005: 343) then holding a sense of self appears to be essential. Webster emphasises the significance of client 'being taken seriously' and of therapists being consistently genuine in interaction (1998: 186), silent enough to truly hear and inwardly attend to the essence of the Other (Fredriksson, 1999). From this perspective, presence appears to be the offering of a highly authentic self in relationship, congruence between words and actions is emphasised too, resulting in a discernible development of trust.

Whilst Webster (1998) and Fredriksson (1999) allude to the importance of inner wholeness and the journey toward greater self-awareness that we might 'change and be changed by' our encounters (Webster, 1998: 189), the personal demands of this stance appear rarely noted. I am prompted to question if it might be possible to become so overwhelmed by the fluidity or expansiveness of the journey that we neglect to appropriately, adequately or ethically attend to significant aspects of the minutiae of interpersonal encounter and therefore fail to attain an

accurate awareness 'of where clients are in terms of their own process' (Vincent, 2002: 36).

If our presence is to be healing and real (Webster, 1998) then perhaps, as Phelon (2004), urges we need to be consistently aware of and attentive to those 'fluctuations' that may take us from or indeed draw us to the Other (Cameron, 2004). Whilst it is clear that we may offer our congruence, empathy and positive regard, Phelon also suggests we offer our commitment to the process of our *own* emotional and psychological growth. It would seem therefore that our offering of presence, although clearly communicated within the moment of encounter, also remains a perpetual and organic process of personal and professional transformation. Supervision, personal therapy, peer and colleague support may therefore provide aspects of holding that may deeply enhance our capacity to 'be there' and to offer the level of presence envisioned herein.

I come whole
Hopes, fears, fragility.
To wait alongside for what will inevitably emerge
The silences I hold or abandon
Detract, deflect, hold, challenge
And yet beyond this
Beyond my vulnerability, my humanity
My lack of vision, my clumsiness
Exists my presence
My holding, my hope.
For we are
Our stories bear witness to this
Changed, transformed in the telling
Held for a time between us.

Chapter 5

The Space Between

> 'For the therapist using the transpersonal self, the boundaries between therapist and client may fall away. Both may occupy the same space at the same time, at the level of what is sometimes termed soul, sometimes heart, sometimes essence.'
>
> (Rowan, 2004: 21)

The phenomenon of presence as counsellor led, offered to clients within the moment of encounter, appears prevalent within the literature. This would however seem to proffer a somewhat inequitable analysis, and further investigation identified specific texts regarding the presence that may indwell or be co-created in the 'space between' (Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996; Janecka, 2000). This affords to the study an alterative dimension for it surely encourages us to look beyond ourselves and acknowledge the inevitability of the Other. Our presence, it would seem, may be truly made manifest in the experience of being received; and this perhaps is meeting at its most profound (McMillan, 2004).

The space between counsellor and client is examined variously within the research. Josselson (1996: 5) clearly suggests there might be ways within which we have the potential to 'reach through' this space, implying a necessary and perhaps inevitable negotiation of a void. Conversely perhaps, it becomes clear through the literature that others envisage a realm that both client and counsellor may indwell, thereby drawing our attention to the co-creative aspects of such encounter (Hycner, 1993; Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996). It is also apparent that, however our presences retain the potential to meet, something distinct may emerge greater by far than the sum of their parts (Cooper, 2005b). This might not only be personally challenging but may profoundly frustrate our current professional bias toward the more coherent and contained.

In his study of countertransference, Hoyt uses the phrase 'client-inspired therapist

contributions' (2001: 1013) and suggests that these may emerge variously through our 'presence, attunement, empathy, rapport and compassion' (Ibid: 1014). It would appear that to be truly affected by what might be understood as the essence of the client, we need to attend to those aspects of process and relationship that may surpass the tangible. Importantly Hoyt reflects on the more subtle facets of our meeting that may exist beyond any attempt to objectify or analyse. Whilst clearly not advocating a laissez-faire attitude to either process or relationship, he suggests that becoming overly concerned with the minutiae of encounter may serve to 'inhibit our humanity and therapeutic creativity' and may 'block the magic that dwells in every moment' (Ibid: 1015).

In our consideration of the space between, we are perhaps compelled to recognise not 'whether' but 'how' we are personally involved within the journey as intimate partners (Hoffman, 1996: 122/33). In their qualitative study of silence and rapport, Sharpley, Munro & Elly emphasise the significance of 'careful observation' in identifying the nature and potential purpose of periods of silence (2005: 158). It becomes apparent here however that our attention to our clients, particularly perhaps to their presence, may extend far further than simply 'careful observation'. If we are to gain an accurate sense of what may be an 'appropriate response' at a certain time with a certain client (Ibid: 159) then it is their presence, it would seem, to which we should most carefully attend.

It would appear therefore that what Hoyt eloquently envisions as 'sympathetic vibration' (2001: 1016) might be an eloquent depiction of the moments within which presences touch (Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996; Webster, 1998; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; MacCallum Sullivan & Goldenberg, 2003) and this perhaps necessarily only occurs in the space between us. It is also argued that only as counsellor and client both 'expand' (Cameron, 2002, 2004), the potential for resonance, communion or presence may be authentically realised. It might therefore be accurate to conclude that we do not necessarily 'use' ourselves in any pre-

ordained manner but have the potential to respond to each moment as it emerges from the last.

Boundaries though surely become apparent with this space and whilst these may be an integral aspect of our mutual negotiation and the ethical maintenance of the relationship, they may significantly affect the experiencing of presence and the 'density of the air' between counsellor and client (Webster, 1998: 185). I am however prompted to question if these boundaries, however ethical or appropriate, may also retain the potential to become powerful defences at the heart of the collaborative space. Thorne (2002) would appear to agree here with Hoyt (2001) in questioning how our caution might impact our presence within the moment of encounter intruding upon our capacity to truly remain 'present with'.

However non-directive our practice purports to be, it is argued that the 'boundary' between therapist and client remains unequivocally 'hierarchically organised' (Hoffman, 1996: 116). An abandonment to process or an acknowledgment of the mystery and 'magic' (Hoyt, 2001: 1015) of therapy may therefore hold a somewhat dangerous potential to anaesthetise us to the powerful 'nature of our participation in the process' (Hoffman, 1996: 112). It would appear potentially significant to both process and relationship if we have the capacity to engage with the spontaneity, transparency and immediacy portrayed variously by Spinelli (1997, 2007), Natiello (2001), Thorne (2002), Yalom (2002), Mearns & Cooper (2005).

As we encounter, the 'space between' it perhaps becomes apparent that much may become manifest within it and it is argued that we need to become attuned to the manner within which it 'reverberates' (Josselson, 1996: 5) or 'becomes alive' (Barrett-Lennard, 2003: 53). Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott (1996) expound various concepts of presence, but it is at the level of 'transcendent presence' that they explore a level of connectedness and intimacy wherein they would contend true meeting occurs and authentic presence may emerge. Being open to and aware of the place, position and needs of the Other would appear essential (Craig, 2000; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Reupert, 2006), and although Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott

clearly emphasise the significance of our embodiment of empathy, caring and use of self (1996: 27), they also highlight the fact that this does not happen in isolation. The nurses within their research were powerfully affected by the presence of their patients however physically, emotionally or psychologically fragile.

The co-creative or collaborative aspects of encounter are also powerfully portrayed by Mearns in his poignant exposition of his therapeutic meetings with 'Rick' (Mearns & Cooper, 2005). Throughout their initial twenty-seven sessions of silence they were clearly present together, and the evident intensity of the space between them was surely pivotal to both process and relationship. Goldenberg and Isaacson explore their notion of the 'narrow ridge' (1996: 118); the 'intimate edge' perhaps (Ehrenberg, 1992), and 'for Buber there existed a preparedness to go from oneself towards another' (cited in Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996: 121). It would seem therefore that both counsellor and client are required to hold this preparedness, for it becomes apparent again that true presence is, in essence, created between 'two 'I's'. 'Dialogue', however silent, surely 'involves both address and response' (Ibid: 122/5). Thus this space may be experienced less as a void and more a 'fluid, vibrant entity' of change, negotiation and being together (Henkelman & Paulson, 2006: 142).

It would be inappropriate to present this facet of the debate without reference to Buber's concept of 'I and Thou'. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this study to explore the themes central to his understanding, our consideration of the space between counsellor and client surely falls between the I and Thou; where presences meet and wherein 'tangible changes in atmosphere may be felt' (Cameron, 2002: 265). However, although this space has been envisioned as a mutual meeting place wherein both may encounter aspects of the essence of the Other, Hoffman urges us to recognise that, as counsellors, our presence may be exceptionally powerful with whatever we do 'saturated with suggestion' (1996: 105/6).

Josselson reflects on the ways in which we might 'overcome the space between us' (1996: 6)

and yet in 'mutuality we stand side by side…creating a bond that is the product of both people, an emergent *we* in the space between' (Ibid: 7). Our presence may surely retain the capacity to 'bridge' this space however; thereby enabling us to engage in a metaphorical 'holding' of the Other and becoming powerfully present both *with* and *to* them. This perhaps remains one of the central challenges of presence, for as we 'extend towards' or indeed 'withdraw from' our clients (Cameron, 2002: 260) it is argued that we simultaneously communicate powerful messages of availability, respect, commitment, empathy, congruence and positive regard.

Crucially it would seem, and rarely identified within the literature thus far, Cameron highlights the potential 'threat or invasion' that may be experienced by clients through our presence with them (2002: 261). It would therefore appear vital to the maintenance of an appropriately ethical relationship that we attend with exceptional care to the manner in which we meet, and to the physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual manifestations of our presence. 'There is no concept or word in English' Cameron later reflects 'for a part of the person that can extend beyond the skin and then be drawn back in' (Ibid: 262), and yet this research prompts me to suggest that it is essentially our presence we may extend or withdraw, and that the space between us therefore holds considerably 'more than thin air' (Ibid: 265).

Impossible to comprehend
I journey not knowing
Do I underestimate the impact of this un-knowing on my spirit?
My soul?
How far can I travel in this?
How much do I need to abandon?
For trusting my integrity, my compassion, my competency
I offer, ultimately, only my self
And can this ever be enough?

Chapter 6

Negotiated Being

> 'Moments in which the client's presence to the therapist's presence, or the therapist's flow in response to the client's flow, creates a synergistic encounter that may not be reducible to the sum of its individual parts.'
>
> (Cooper, 2005a: 93)

'Between is not an auxiliary construction, but the real place and bearer of what happens between [us]' reflects Buber (1965: 203) and so, inevitably perhaps, our negotiation of this space remains inherently fragile; 'unrehearsed and unanticipated' (Natiello, 2001: 26). As we move within and between different levels, 'continuously co-creating' (Ibid: 27), it would appear that far from remaining a static entity, our presence with our clients remains disturbingly open to fluctuation. If our meeting truly holds the potential for healing that many would contend (Rogers, 1980, 1989; Thorne, 1991, 2002; Friedman, 1994; Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Craig, 2000; Natiello, 2001; Yalom, 2002), then it surely behoves us to attend with care to its inherent, and perhaps disquieting, fluidity.

Rogers consistently emphasised the authenticity of relationship between therapist and client and is joined by others, not solely within the humanistic school, in offering discussion, debate and challenge regarding the personal and professional demands of such a stance (Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996; Mearns & Thorne, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Knox, 2007). Largely unconscious, it would appear that negotiation occurs throughout our process together with 'feeling and thinking engaged in a continuous dance' (Park, 2000: 13). It becomes clear that our negotiated being with another might demand a capacity to move somewhat swiftly between states as we strive to become 'more flexibly and intimately present' (Thomson, 2000: 531). The subtlety of this negotiation however is marked and, as Kahn suggests, 'each small vagary is likely to be charged with extreme importance for the client' (1997: 2).

As therapists, do we hold a tendency to underestimate not simply the space we may occupy but the influence we hold within these encounters (Hoffman, 1996)? It is also argued that we cannot 'encounter' unless we are invited into the presence of the Other, and our clients surely have the 'choice to accept or reject the gift' of our being there (Fredriksson, 1999: 1171).

What Cooper describes as 'synergistic encounter' (2005a), Cameron as 'energy awareness' (2004) and Rowan as 'dual unity' (2004), Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott speak of as 'energy exchange' which may move 'beyond the interactional to the transpersonal' (1996: 28). Our negotiation of the therapeutic dance creates an image of mutuality and conjoined movement, described by Fredriksson as the 'flow of feelings between two persons with different modes of being in a shared situation' (1999: 1170). It is argued here that it is the 'between that needs to be acknowledged, there is a call and a response' (Hycner, 1991: 27). In their envisioning of full and transcendent presence as fundamentally and unequivocally dyadic, Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott highlight the 'reciprocal' nature of such 'interactional flow' (1996: 27), energy is also described as moving 'beyond' the encounter, holding a transformative quality greater, it is purported, than its discrete constituents.

The spontaneity, fluidity and flexibility emphasised by Kahn (1997), and reflected to varying degrees by others (La Torre, 2002; Thorne, 2002, 2006; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Mearns & Cooper, 2005), would appear not simply conducive to the development of a therapeutic environment of congruence, authenticity and trust but may enhance the quality of presence we are able to offer. Whilst it would seem that this demands a certain ability to 'sit with intimate awareness of the present moment' (Thomson, 2000: 533), it becomes apparent that our attunement necessarily requires active participation. We ostensibly retain the capacity to deny or distort our presence as much as we might enhance or sustain it (Deurzen-Smith, 1997). Our presences may meet within this place but they may also retreat; we may be more or less available within each moment (Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006).

This surely then indicates a responsiveness to the moment of encounter, opening space for negotiation, allowing oneself to be vulnerable, fragile or mistaken (Thorne, 2002). I can strongly identify with the 'ontological insecurity' emphasised by Deurzen-Smith (1997: 194), for in my work within palliative care I am inevitably compelled to face a considerable degree of unknowing that is not purely 'magical' (Hoyt, 2001: 1015) but frequently frightening. Perhaps, as Deurzen-Smith asserts, we should 'be prepared to stand in the tension between the other's perception of reality and our own point of view' (1997: 218), and it appears that it is this tension that may emerge in the space between us, becoming an integral facet of our collaborative journey. It would be naïve to consider that, as therapists, we alone experience this tension for surely both counsellor and client are present and both, therefore, relate to each other in the 'same complex multi-layered manner' (Ibid.).

The risk of this position seems pertinent however, and research undertaken by Knox highlights the impact, on both process and relationship, of 'getting engaged' whilst identifying a distinct correlation between the 'level of risk taking and the vibrancy' of process and relationship (2007: 318). Knox also emphasises the apparent inevitability of feelings of vulnerability experienced by therapists electing to engage in such a manner, and yet the more we are able to hold a 'vital and dynamic attitude…' (Deurzen-Smith, 1997: 192) the more, it would seem, we may communicate the depth of presence analysed herein.

I believe it could be argued that the level of authentic engagement reflected variously within the literature may help to diminish our inherent proclivity to form inaccurate assumptions regarding the nature of the reality of our clients. In Henkelman & Paulson's study of hindering experiences within therapy (2006), it becomes apparent that the relationship again remains central to the process, as they reflect on the difference between counsellors and clients in the 'interpretation of experience in counselling' they clearly emphasise the impact of a conscious 'engagement in the client's world' (: 141). Participants within the Geller &

Greenberg study reflect on the significance of our accessibility, transparency, congruence and intuitive responding (2002: 76), seemingly held within a 'full immersion in each moment as it arrives…touching and being touched by the essence of the client' (Ibid: 78).

The self-awareness, commitment to development, and acknowledgement of our humanity as reflected within research (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Webster, 1998; Fredriksson, 1999; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Phelon, 2004; Reupert, 2006), remains of vital consequence it seems. Our presences may merge in the 'space between' and yet despite our concern for mutuality, allowing emotional and psychological space for another may remain profoundly challenging. It is perhaps important to recognise the aspects of our personality and presence that may impact most significantly on our capacity to negotiate our presence together. Holmes, with others (Hoffman, 1996; Craig, 2000; Thomson, 2000; Hoyt, 2001; Thorne, 2002; Phelon, 2004; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Reupert, 2006), reflects on the central importance of our capacity to retain an awareness of our own internal reality whilst 'interacting with the client' (1999: 41).

Geller & Greenberg (2002) also consider what may be perceived as the pro-active aspect of presence in that it may encompass the commitment, and also surely the desire, to encounter the client with immediacy and transparency. However the described 'energy and flow', 'spaciousness' and 'enhanced awareness' of therapists may or may not be perceived by clients and it is surely significant to recognise that the majority of the studies of presence analysed herein represent purely therapist reflections. Future research might be advised to attempt to ascertain the reality of therapeutic presence for clients; whether and to what degree they are impacted by our 'bodily receptivity' or 'energetic awareness' (Ibid: 81).

It is the collaboration of client and counsellor clearly revealed by Cooper (2005) and Spinelli (2007), that Deurzen-Smith refers to as offering the potential to 'weave a new world out of what…each have to offer' (1997: 225). Bugental reflects on the 'therapeutic alliance' as a

'powerful joining of forces which energises and supports the frequently painful work of… psychotherapy' (1992: 49), thereby emphasising the reality of our mutual presence and, as much of the literature appears to concede, the therapeutic journey is never travelled in isolation for 'both therapist and client are moved by each other' (Jordan, 1997: 349). And yet, as Spinelli challenges, what is it like for our clients to be within our presence, and indeed for us as we accompany them? As counsellors, how willing are we 'to attempt [the] enterprise of shifting between these polarities' (2007: 13)?

The research compels us to acknowledge that we do not work alone, for our sensitivity to our own presence and to the presence of our clients clearly remains at the very heart of our 'being there' (Janecka, 2000). If we have the personal and professional capacity to hold this awareness, then perhaps we might ultimately be afforded the privilege of transcending our intrinsic 'separateness' (Cameron, 2002: 271) and may recognise, disturbingly perhaps, that we are fundamentally 'members one of another' (Thorne, 1991: 78).

Suddenly I am taken further, beyond physicality
To the touching of spirits, I and Thou
I am silenced, caught by the immensity of what I see, feel, experience
Prompting tears, weariness
Is it possible to offer what I cannot understand?
This presence is beyond me and yet communicated by me every moment
I cannot escape it, it becomes…
Love, compassion, frustration, pain
Pouring through me
Can I hold this?
Do I need to?
How dangerous am I in this moment of encounter
How precarious my existence?
Where, in this moment, is my client?
And how, in this moment, am I hearing him?

Chapter 7

Existential and Spiritual Dimensions

> 'The soul reminds us that there is…a world far deeper and more primordial than our logical processes. Soul is the door to this ancient imaginal world. To know the soul we must lay aside our rational ways of knowing and open ourselves to the world of reverence, feeling and imagination.'
>
> (Elkins, 1995: 78)

It becomes apparent within much of the literature that our openness to presence may encompass elements of the spiritual, existential or mystical. Frequently we may be taken beyond the immediacy, and the urgency, of the present moment and if we are to truly glimpse the presence of our clients we may find ourselves compelled to move the line of our horizons (Witte-Townsend & Di Giulio, 2004), that our perception might become more complete.

Elkins (1995) is joined by others, notably Buber (1958, 1965), Bragan (1996), Thorne (1991, 1998, 2002), Craig (2000), Moore & Purton (2000), West (2000), Young-Eisendrath & Miller (2000), Da Costa (2003) and Crossley & Salter (2005), in reflecting on the spirituality of therapeutic accompaniment but appears to extend certain facets. Viewing psychotherapy as essentially the 'art of nurturing and healing the soul' (1995: 90), Elkins argues for the power and potential of love at the heart of the therapeutic endeavour. Whilst much of the literature appears to suggest that our sensitive and intuitive communication of the attitudinal qualities of empathy, acceptance, respect, courage and honesty (BACP, 2003), may be intrinsically and inherently healing, Elkins asserts that this process cannot be appropriate, nor perhaps ethical, unless our extending of ourselves (Cameron, 2002, 2004) emerges from our own soul, core or essence; surely the true 'I' of Buber's 'I-Thou' (1958).

An openness to the existential or spiritual surely demands a level of attending and a depth of presence that may extend far beyond the 'partial' or 'full' presence envisioned by Osterman &

Schwartz-Barcott (1996). Indeed it would appear that this is presence at the level or of the quality of the transcendent or transpersonal (Craig, 2000; Rowan, 2004). As we become attuned to the wholeness of our clients; breathing in 'their totality' perhaps (Mearns & Cooper, 2005: 120); we listen beyond the 'surface narrative' to the 'emotional subtext', whilst tolerating the 'discomfort of ambiguity' and the 'tension of not knowing' (Charles, 2004: 55).

Therapists within Phelon's study emphasised the significance of what they termed an 'integrated spiritual practice' to the maintenance and support of 'healing presence' (2004: 352). Phelon also emphasises the impact of this presence as it is communicated, in part, through 'alignment with the client', 'transcendence of role', 'inner stillness' and 'receptivity' (Ibid: 347/8). Geller & Greenberg (2002) identify aspects of the preparation, process and experiencing of presence identifying therapist 'attitudes of openness' and 'philosophical commitment' prompting the capacity to 'listen with the third ear', supporting the development of 'spontaneity and trust' and a more 'intuitive responding' (Ibid: 76).

It would seem that openness to process might be crucial if we are to move with the fluidity and flexibility reflected by many within this realm (Hycner, 1991; Fredriksson, 1999; Craig, 2000; Thomson, 2000; Cameron, 2002, 2004; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; La Torre, 2002; Phelon, 2004; Cooper, 2005a, 2005b). It also becomes apparent that to extend emotionally or energetically (Robbins, 1998; Schmid, 1998; Cameron, 2004) towards the Other demands a willingness to be known as much as an openness to know. This may result in our capacity to become 'more flexibly and intimately present' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 80), revealed through a spirit of unselfconsciousness or selflessness (Weinstein, 1998), alongside a recognition of the 'nowness' of the encounter. Geller & Greenberg (2002) highlight the expansion of self, reflected also at depth by Cameron (2004) that may, at times, lead to an 'altered state of consciousness' (: 78), and they are clearly not alone in their consideration of the significance of the sharing of this 'sacred space' (Ibid.).

Again, as with other facets of presence, this experience would appear to be 'fundamentally dyadic' (Cooper, 2005b: 18), we meet as spirit, *souls* perhaps, and it remains essentially an 'I-Thou' encounter, eloquently envisioned by Buber as the more fundamental aspects of our self reaching out to the Other (1965). It is perhaps within the realms of the existential, mystical or spiritual that we may glimpse not only the extent of the psychotherapeutic encounter but our intrinsic capacity for beyondness.

Hycner reflects at length on the inherent mystery of the therapeutic process identifying the multifarious paradoxes of our work, and emphasising the boundary positions we are perhaps compelled to assume as we stand 'precariously poised between consciousness and unconsciousness' (1991: 17). This so-called 'oscillation of consciousness' inevitably demands a considerable degree of both professional and personal flexibility as we move somewhat rapidly between feeling states (Park, 2000) whilst potentially experiencing the dissipation of the boundaries between us (Webster, 1998; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; La Torre, 2002; Rowan, 2004). And yet, as Hycner also surmises, this does not protect us from the reality of our humanity with its attendant 'frailty, uncertainty, or fear' (1991: 24).

Whilst meeting beyond edges and boundaries may feel freeing and energising and may also enable us to relate at considerable depth (Mearns & Thorne, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Cooper, 2005a, 2005b; Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006; Schudel, 2006), it may also be experienced as somewhat chaotic or frightening, particularly perhaps for clients. If we are to maintain a level of intimacy within the therapeutic encounter, or perhaps tolerate the intrinsic demands of truly 'being there', it is argued that we need a spiritual practice that may hold us safely within this most vulnerable of worlds (Bragan, 1996; Schmid, 1998; West, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Da Costa, 2003; Phelon, 2004). Thomson reflects on his experiencing of Zen meditation and joins others (Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Crane & Elias, 2006; Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006) in highlighting the impact of 'awakening to the phenomenal present'

(2000: 538). It is here perhaps, within such 'awakening', that we may require the courage envisioned by Thorne (2002), for our personal and professional abandonment to the process of psychotherapeutic accompaniment may be profoundly challenging.

It would appear that self-awareness is not purely a pre-requisite for the development of a therapeutic relationship of authenticity and depth but that it may also facilitate an openness to aspects of the unknown (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; Spinelli, 1997, 2007; Hoyt, 2001; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; La Torre, 2002; Thorne, 2002; Harper, 2006). Indeed, the more we 'become familiar with [our] own unconscious, the more [we may] feel sufficiently confident to use it as a resource' reflects Charles (2004: 19). This perhaps necessarily demands a significant degree of commitment (Cooper, 2005b), holding the intention for presence identified by Geller & Greenberg (2002) and communicated through our stillness or attitude of 'mindfulness' (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; West, 2000; Hoyt, 2001; La Torre, 2002; Kolodny, 2004; Phelon, 2004; Rowan, 2004; Crane & Elias, 2006). Meditation was a daily practice maintained by 'the majority of therapists' within Geller & Greenberg's study (2002: 77), which would perhaps substantiate La Torre's claim (2002) that reflective disciplines may be conducive to the cultivation of therapeutic presence (Craig, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Crane & Elias, 2006; Harper, 2006).

Within our being for the Other we are, it is argued, acutely present with our 'self' and, as has become apparent, this will require a considerable level of awareness, discipline and commitment to process. However, what appears to become more explicit here is the degree of abandonment demanded within the moment of encounter as we are inevitably confronted with both 'freedom and risk' (Schmid, 1998: 82). Surely our openness to dimensions of the existential or spiritual does not offer a retreat from the rawness or the reality of life, although certain practices may clearly hold the potential to be utilised in this way (Gubi, 2007). We need 'to be immersed in the complexities of living as actively as possible' argues Deurzen-

Smith (1997: 200), for only then perhaps might our presence retain the authenticity that may appropriately facilitate meeting at the depth envisioned herein.

In his profound reflection regarding 'real presences', Steiner draws the reader powerfully and compellingly beyond the tangible into realms of the transcendent, questioning the apparent 'mystery' of the 'theological, social, erotic, moral' relations that pervade our personal, professional and spiritual worlds (1989: 148). Reflecting on his sense of our existential aloneness, the author clearly highlights the many ways within which we may 'allow ourselves to be touched or not to be touched by the presence of the Other' (Ibid.). Might it therefore be accurate to conclude that we may fail to meet at the level where presences touch if we neglect to attend to what might be perceived as our inherent, and therefore unique, spirituality? Importantly Bragan emphasises spirituality as a quality that emerges as opposed to 'something extraneous' (1996: 108), we become increasingly attuned to the essence of the Other, engaging perhaps in a metaphorical 'tearing away' of all that 'may stand between us' (Laing cited in Bragan, 1996: 110).

Whilst Thomson (2000) clearly alludes to the apparent simplicity of this way of being, the literature also urges us to recognise the courage, resilience and strength necessitated if this is to be appropriately and ethically maintained (Hoffman, 1996; Webster, 1998; Craig, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Knox, 2007) demanding perhaps 'all our integrity' (Witte-Townsend & Di Giulio, 2004: 139). As we sit with this heightened attunement to the moment of encounter we may sense a 'fundamental stillness and spaciousness' (Thomson, 2000: 531) for, as Rowan clearly asserts, we are surely not 'limited by a narrow definition of our humanity' (2004: 22), nor do we live entirely 'boundaried by our skin (Cameron, 2004: 173). So herein, perhaps, exists the greatest potential for intimacy and for the depth of relationship envisioned by Rogers as the meeting and touching of inner spirits (1980).

Suddenly overwhelmed
Caught in the ineffability of this concept
The simplicity of being
Yet the demands of the same
For my presence disturbs
Much in my history rises up to meet me
Reconciliation necessary perhaps?
Forgiveness?
And intense sadness
Reaching, it seems, into the very heart of me
Aching, longing.

How does my journey find itself here?
The present moment challenges me
Mindful of today
I carry echoes of distant times
They do not leave me entirely
My propensity for authenticity,
My capacity to hear pain.
I awaken to new realities
Shaped always by my heritage.
This is no retreat,
No cosy, self-indulgent fantasy
This is rawness with reality, the profundity of pain
This is living,
Being
And I grieve
For what is.

Chapter 8

Discussion

> 'The faint little sound of a speaking voice arrests the ear in the midst of the medley of mechanical sounds and is something altogether different, because its significance is of a different order; similarly the space in a picture engages our vision completely because it is significant in itself, not as part of the surrounding room.'
>
> (Langer, 1953: 83)

As I struggled to identify distinct aspects of presence I found myself encountering what Schudel envisions as the 'painful gap' between aspects that are 'verbally expressible, and the inexhaustible' facets that remain fundamentally 'inexpressible' (2006: 127). Presence may powerfully challenge our desire to analyse, and yet holds a compelling quality that draws many to begin the process attempted herein. Initially it may appear no more than a 'faint little sound' but as it emerges it may be striking in its intensity. Presence speaks its own language it seems, and we understand it not through our ability to hear but our capacity to attend; for it is perhaps to be open to communication of a very 'different order' (Langer, 1953: 83).

A recent study into the realm of diversity alerted me to the power of presence in offering a way of being regardless of professional allegiance. Our 'self' is unavoidably present (Reupert, 2006) and remains undeniably a key factor within the psychotherapeutic process. How, therefore, does this 'self' communicate itself variously, and perhaps indiscriminately, through and within our presence? 'Presence involves being with another person in an intimate way' asserts Finfgeld-Connett (2006: 710), so is presence an aspect of our 'self' in relationship or our whole self in experienced form? This research compels me to argue that our presence encompasses far more than our capacity to 'be with', so perhaps, as Rogers proposed, it is indeed 'something around the edges' (cited in Baldwin, 2000: 30).

Schudel was the only author I identified who attempted to distinguish between different

forms, as opposed to levels, of presence, and identifies that 'professional presence stands for the experience of 'being' the core conditions, resulting from being deeply in touch with the clients as well as ones own core' (2006: 128). It might therefore be accurate to conclude that to offer an appropriate level of *professional* presence, we are necessarily compelled to recognise, establish and maintain a sense of our own, distinctively manifested, *personal* presence. Might we therefore be conspiring to our own diminishment, and the diminishment of the therapeutic alliance, if we strive to practice without an acknowledgment of our unique capacity for relatedness?

The level of presence reflected within the research is clearly one of full engagement and within which a degree of risk taking apparently remains central (Finfgeld-Connett, 2006; Knox, 2007). The more present we become, the more challenge we perhaps inevitably meet, and yet, despite the potential threat to process and/or relationship, it is the only way I see that my person-centredness might truly and fully manifest itself. Historically, particularly within the humanistic school, a high value has been afforded to the development of the relationship between therapist and client. It would appear here that the aspects of our presence communicated through our authenticity, transparency or immediacy (Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Cooper, 2005a, 2005b), demands a certain abandonment, not purely to the reality of deep encounter but to considerable un-knowing, and asks, therefore, that we hold a significant degree of courage or steadiness (Rogers, 1980; Thorne, 2002; Kolodny, 2004).

Thorne frequently explores the mystical within psychotherapeutic practice identifying the spiritual disciplines that may be required to facilitate interpersonal connectedness at the deepest level (1998, 2002, 2006). Charles (2004), reflecting on Rogers, argues that he became 'increasingly aware of experiences that could not be studied empirically' and within which 'there seemed to be a touching of souls' involving the 'transcendent, indescribable, and spiritual' (: 120). And yet if we really 'speak the world in our own way' (Steiner, 1989: 56)

then I would question what aspects of ourselves we may necessarily need to transcend in order that we might more fully absorb, reflect and respond to the essence of the other. As Thomson argues, unless we remain 'grounded in our own emptiness we cannot perhaps appreciate the true extent of our interrelatedness', and may consequently fail to 'encounter our clients with the intimacy and the immediacy we value' (2000: 540).

My current sense is that presence may be a uniquely powerful embodiment of the core conditions but that it possesses a distinct quality surpassing these (Pruller-Jagenteufel, 2006: 120). The literature appears to reveal that, however present we endeavour to be, it is within those moments beyond our conscious striving that our presence may truly become 'releasing and helpful' (Rogers, 1980: 129). The texts also concede that this demands self-awareness, commitment to process, resilience, strength, humility and openness, that we might attain a 'thorough intimacy with whatever is happening' (Anderson, 1999: 18). It is my sense that if we can remain within this intimacy without defensiveness or retreat then our presence will become increasingly apparent. However it would appear that the majority of the literature fails to fully examine the challenges we may inexorably encounter as we attempt to offer our presence at the level examined here, and that existential-humanistic psychotherapy perhaps inevitably demands (Natiello, 2001).

Frequently I became overwhelmed, not purely by the nature of the heuristic research journey, but the extent of the challenge inherent in being present to such a profound degree. Within palliative care I find this level of attending deeply demanding. Acutely aware of the potential gaucherie of my presence within such fragile terrains, I frequently find myself withdrawing slightly in order that I might become more delicately responsive to the physical and emotional frailty of my clients. Increasingly now, within the silence that often emerges, we reflect together, with immediacy and transparency, on the precise moment of our encounter, striving to attend to the echoes, reverberations and sensings of our mutual 'beingness'.

I would join Bugental (1992) in wondering whether, within our training and continued professional development, sufficient attention is paid to this elusive but powerfully significant phenomenon. It would also seem pertinent to question if the proposed changes to initial training might increasingly marginalise this sphere. It is has become my belief that it can be all too easy to lose a personal sense of the essence of our clients within our professional awareness of the 'big picture' (McLellan, 1999: 330). Despite our personal and professional concern for mutuality, I believe that the presences of our clients are becoming increasingly lost under the established authority of professional discourse. With many of the authors reflected herein, I would argue that what is essential within our relating is not only our acceptance of the intrinsic complexity of interpersonal encounter but the 'mutual influence of therapist and client' (Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000: 35).

Powerfully challenging our sense of the coherent and contained, presence may elude us, but its reality appears undeniable and its influence considerable. It would appear to be substantiated by a significant amount of research (Janecka, 1998; Fredriksson, 1999; Craig, 2000; Geller & Greenberg, 2002; Reupert, 2006; Bien, 2006) that presence is perceived as intrinsically therapeutic. However it gradually, and somewhat disturbingly, became apparent that our presence may not necessarily be healing, despite the significant amount of literature that ostensibly seeks to persuade us such.

The obvious paucity of literature exploring the abusive potential of an inappropriate communication of presence obliges me to question the true impact of the aspects of this phenomenon we have historically held as restorative. It would appear therefore that our professional confidence in the healing qualities of presence may have anaesthetised us to a more comprehensive, albeit more challenging, acknowledgement of its power. I would propose that this apparent dearth of research has resulted in a bias of both approach and expectation. Has it perhaps become a 'given' within psychotherapy that presence is

unequivocally healing and, if so, might we inadvertently continue to silence significant aspects of what we most need to hear?

Whilst Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott highlight some possible 'negative outcomes' with regard to the therapeutic offering of partial, full or transcendent presence (1996: 25), the data indeed appear to remain largely 'silent on…negative consequences related to aborted attempts to establish presence' (Finfgeld-Connett, 2006: 712). It has become my belief that it might be possible for us to both hold and communicate our presence with care, although I failed to discover anything within the literature to substantiate this somewhat audacious claim. It would therefore appear to be important to recognise the absence of significant debate regarding the impact of an inappropriate holding, or withholding, of presence within the therapeutic relationship, and to accept that this will have inevitably influenced the manner in which presence is perceived within the wider counselling community. I would join McMillan in suggesting that 'there is much discussion still to be had concerning the nature and quality of presence' (2004: 69), specifically perhaps from the perspective of clients.

Presence, as reflected within much of the literature, is perceived primarily as a phenomenon that emerges in the process of being together. I would therefore argue that to claim presence as an exclusive privilege of practitioners is to hold a contradiction at the heart of the therapeutic endeavour. The vast majority of studies accessed for the purpose of this study hold the counsellor central; voices of clients, although frequently alluded to, remain distinctly veiled. Manthei however clearly focuses on the direct experiences of clients and his research identifies specific aspects of the co-creation of the therapeutic narrative, emphasising the importance of our recognition of mutuality (2007). How then does our presence or, more precisely, the quality of our presence respond to the presence of our clients? Have we the capacity, or perhaps the inclination to energetically withdraw (Cameron, 2004) if we sense our clients' desire for more space; room to breathe perhaps?

As we emotionally 'extend' toward our clients, it would appear vital to remain acutely aware of their presence with us, it is then perhaps that we may more appropriately negotiate the delicacy of the 'dance of dialogue' (Park, 2000: 11). However, as much as I would continue to argue for the therapeutic potential of relationally deep encounter, by assuming that we have the capacity to 'breathe in' another's 'totality' (Mearns & Cooper, 2005: 120), we may in reality be denying them fundamental aspects of their uniqueness, complexity and mystery. Lomas reflects on our proclivity to 'seize upon one aspect of our clients and fail to recognise their wholeness' (2001: 85), thereby emphasising the importance of our physical, psychological and spiritual attentiveness. Is it however somewhat naïve to assume we can be present to such a profound degree? How open might we potentially need to become if we are to hear and receive our clients with both authenticity and accuracy, whilst maintaining a sense of the deep privilege of such encounter?

It would seem that aspects of our presence are powerfully communicated through our words, embodied response, and psychological availability. I also sense a further dimension that may elude us at a conscious level, but that may enable us to become unconsciously responsive to the energetic, spiritual or psychological movements of the Other. This interchange, or the meeting of presences, is within the moment only, and the fact that our presence is clearly 'held in fluid form' also indicates its somewhat disquieting propensity to change (Rushdie, 1990: 72). However, although I have come to view presence 'as constantly re-constructed and constituted' (Etherington, 2004b: 48), I have an increasing sense that the presence of our self at core or transcendent level might remain consistent enough to afford our 'being' a stability, familiarity and constancy essential to truly therapeutic accompaniment.

With Tacey (2004), Thomson reflects on the significance of maintaining a degree of emptiness that may be required for 'therapeutic dialogue to occur' (2000: 543). If therefore we attempt to fill the therapeutic space with our presence, however well intentioned, it could

perhaps be argued that there will be little room not only for the emergence of mutuality but for the client to connect with her or his essential self. Perhaps therefore it is crucial that we energetically expand and contract with care (Cameron, 2002, 2004) attending to the quality of the air (Webster 1998) within the moment of our meeting. This, it would seem, is not purely the challenge but the 'art of encounter'; of touching and being touched (Schmid, 1998: 74).

I found it significant to reflect on Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott's model (1996) for it offered an understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of presence. It became clear that when we are unable to offer the transcendent presence we may desire, we still have the capacity to offer a level of presence that may remain authentic and empowering. I am led to question whether transcendent presence demands from us a level of commitment and consciousness that can be hard to adequately and appropriately maintain and that also, importantly, might be somewhat overwhelming for clients to receive. I sense that balance is demanded and feel that within our practice this might increasingly become the edge we are compelled to negotiate. Current revisions to training and practice might repeatedly call into question the humanistic concept of being as opposed to doing, and yet if we are to 'understand' rather than simply 'master skills' (Hansen, 2005: 408) then we surely need to attend with care to our way of being personally present within the inherent fragility of the psychotherapeutic journey.

My personal journey through initial engagement, immersion, and incubation toward illumination, explication and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990) culminated in a significant personal therapy session toward the final stages of my research. Whilst encountering a more immediate sense of my personal presence, it became clear that to be present with the 'self' is a pre-requisite to an authentic communication of our presence with another. I recognised that I had been striving to maintain an attitude of intense beingness, embracing the suffering of my clients, without fully encountering certain aspects of my own shadow (Page, 1999). If the 'solid ground' of therapeutic meeting can only be truly created through the 'crucible' of this

encounter with the self, then my abandonment to this process, whilst disquieting, was vital to my continuing personal and professional journey (Sherwood, 2001: 2).

It would appear therefore that if we are to truly remain present, not purely physically, intellectually or emotionally, but 'transcendentally' perhaps (Osterman & Schwartz-Barcott, 1996; West, 2000; Thorne, 2002; Rowan, 2004) then this will be personally demanding, taking us, unavoidably, to our own places of vulnerability. More perhaps is required of us than a desire to find a way to enable our clients to 'make contact with their deepest realisations' and discover how we might increasingly make contact with our own (Kolodny 2004: 92). Self-awareness has consistently emerged as a necessary pre-requisite to an appropriate communication of presence. If therefore we strive to become 'intensively present' (Kolodny, 2004: 92) and increasingly 'in touch with our own core' (Schudel, 2006: 128), we might perhaps achieve a more accurate understanding of the demands of becoming 'presence to the Other' (Buber, 1958) and, importantly, the true impact of the same.

This, I would propose, might not simply refine the nature of our presence with our clients but enhance the levels of awareness emphasised by numerous authors as fundamental to being present at the depth, and of the quality, psychotherapy demands. It is perhaps only as we appropriately attend to our own inner selves that we are afforded the privilege and the responsibility of truly attending 'to the inner selves of [our clients]' (Miller & Baldwin, 2000: 254). Ethical frameworks and codes of practice do not protect us here, regardless of therapeutic stance or philosophical belief, this 'is' because 'we are'. Does the literature somewhat minimise the influence of our essential 'self' on both process and relationship?

More than the capacity to 'be with', presence has emerged as a uniquely complex phenomenon, the recognition and acceptance of which may afford to the therapeutic relationship significant depth and authenticity. The literature prompts an acknowledgement of presence as a physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual manifestation of our 'self' in

relationship, communicated through our being, offering, engagement, openness, empathy and regard. Amorphous and elusive, presence may emerge from the more fundamental levels of our humanity and, despite its inherent insubstantiality, its reverberations may be powerful. This also necessarily demands that we attend to the unique presence of our clients through an essential acknowledgment of the mystery and the mutuality of encounter.

Our capacity to relate from a more profound sense of our 'self' may require mindfulness, openness and stability and yet, whilst much of the research would appear to concede that full engagement with another is personally demanding, I would question if we fully attend to the implications of this. Meeting at relational depth (Mearns & Cooper, 2005) inevitably brings risk (Knox, 2007), and it is here perhaps that we require not only courage and integrity (Thorne, 2002), but 'absolute trust' (Cooper, 2005b: 19). Within the current political and professional climate it would seem that, as counsellors, we are rapidly becoming much less inclined to encounter our clients at the levels reflected here. Are we really abandoning our humanity I wonder (Mearns & Thorne, 2000; Hansen, 2007)?

Whilst our being at the level Elkins (1995) appears to suggest, or our 'sensitive attunement' perhaps (Soth, 2006: 40), might be perceived as freely or spontaneously offered within the relationship it is surely not without cost. Hycner (1991) powerfully reflects on the impact of such an attitudinal stance. We may indeed be 'haunted' here, and frequently find ourselves caught in ambiguity, contradiction and paradox, and if our presence is to be held here then, unavoidably, so too will our frailty, uncertainty and fear. Presence, it would seem, requires an acceptance rather than a denial of our fallibility and therefore, at times, might demand significantly 'more of us than we [may] have to give' (Ibid: 27). And yet, as we enter our own places of fragility, we may become more sensitively attuned to the essence of the other; acknowledging the essential uniqueness and inherent potential of our humanity.

Beyond the apparent narrow ridge of our meeting (Hycner, 1991; Goldenberg & Isaacson,

1996; MacCallum Sullivan & Goldenberg, 2003), we may glimpse aspects of our fundamental aloneness, fragility or vulnerability. Throughout this process I have become increasingly aware of the fragility of presence and yet its potency within the counselling relationship. Compelled, through the literature, to consider some of the physical, emotional, spiritual and existential facets of presence, I am left with an overwhelming sense of the breadth of the debate. I have been powerfully challenged and deeply moved and I know that I hear my clients differently now. Are we then naïve if we deny not only the sanctity of encounter but the delicate balance with which it is held? We exist, it would seem, far beyond our conscious awareness and we know, always, more than we can tell (Polanyi, 1966).

Why does it draw me so?
Why presence so compelling, so moving?
Yet so elusive
I reach for it to discover it gone
Slipping beyond my grasp
Echoes around me
Held in recent receding
How am I here, how present?
Emergence of image, metaphor
Internal holding, frightened retreat
How is it for me to be here?
And for you with me?
Do I damage you?
Intrude into your seclusion
Shatter your fragility…
Can I hold you in this place?
Do you need me to?
Is this Love? Mystery, Reality?
Life perhaps
And how might I live it more fully?

Chapter 9

Summary and Conclusion

I sense a final union
Yet an ever changing, dynamic process
Presence emerging through continual transformation

Therapeutic presence has clearly been extensively researched within the realm of nursing and psychotherapy within the past two decades, and I would join Phelon in testifying to a distinct 'similarity among accounts' (2004: 343). As counsellors, our presence would appear to encompass many aspects of our 'self' in relationship; a complex and subtle manifestation of personality, history, culture, philosophical beliefs, theoretical stance and therapeutic approach. And yet our capacity to hold and be held within the moment reaches, mercifully I believe, far beyond the cognitive, analytical or behavioural. Working as an existential-humanistic practitioner, I could not readily identify where my presence 'ends' and another 'begins', and yet it is this potential meeting point that inspires and disturbs. Whilst this may be experienced as the 'narrow ridge' of our corporate being (Goldenberg & Isaacson, 1996), our presences may fuse within the moment of meeting, and as the margins become the centre perhaps (Moodley, 2007) so too might our narrow ridges become broader plains.

This research prompted a growing and somewhat disconcerting sense that, as therapists, we may be far more tangibly present within the moment of encounter than may have thus far been professionally acknowledged. It would seem highly pertinent to consider how our way of being, philosophical stance and personal negotiation of loss, change, grief or illness may manifest itself within and through our presence, and therefore the manner in which we are truly able to receive the presence of another (Galgut, 2006). This surely raises questions regarding the nature of our individual and corporate practice, for it is not purely through our congruence, empathy or regard that we are encountered by our clients. My heuristic process

emphasised the ways in which we may become progressively present within our encounters, and yet perhaps it becomes a temptation to retreat into this intimacy, becoming 'skilled at engaging with clients' interiority' but 'less so with their exteriority' (Moodley, 2007: 3), and denial of either surely diminishes a sense of our fundamental wholeness.

Presence speaks its own language, powerfully communicating the essence of our 'self' as it meets the reality of the presence of the Other, and 'something emerges' reflects Langer 'that was not there before' (1953: 40). It is this edge we are perhaps compelled to negotiate if we are to hold the mystery of encounter whilst retaining a sense of our innate fallibility. It is my growing sense that we operate frequently on the edge of insight and confusion, we struggle to narrate our world and find it eludes; 'moments stream past us' perhaps (Harrison, 2007). Our presence surely fluctuates, its very reality exists through its capacity to change, to shape and re-shape itself' (Langer, 1953: 66). However, despite the oft reflected insubstantiality of presence, distinct aspects of the debate have become powerfully apparent:

- The importance of high levels of therapist self-awareness to a therapeutic relationship of depth and authenticity
- A distinct correlation between manifestations of personal and professional presence and recognition of the essential uniqueness of the Other
- The multi-faceted nature of presence demanding a fundamental openness to both process and relationship
- The influence of the direct communication of the presence of the counsellor on the facilitation of personal growth and awareness within the client
- The correlation between heightened levels of personal presence and the experiencing of risk within the counselling relationship
- A direct association between the personal communication of presence and heightened levels of trust, respect, congruence, empathy and positive regard
- Identification of the negative aspects of presence and their potential for control, intrusion or abuse

- The personally demanding nature of the communication of professional presence within psychotherapy, emphasising care of self
- An acknowledgement of the essentially dyadic nature of presence
- The significance of the maintenance of reflective/spiritual practices within an appropriate and authentic communication of presence

Considering the therapeutic significance of the above, my professional concern is how we, as therapists, might work to cultivate an enhanced quality of *truly* healing presence, whilst retaining an acute awareness of its inherently elusive nature and form. I would also suggest that, during initial training and beyond, we should attend more fully to the potential impact on clients of our 'being there'. It is vital therefore to consider the relevance of this research to current debate within training and/or development, specifically:

- Paucity of research regarding negative aspects of presence and the impact of this on established perceptions of therapeutic healing particularly within humanism
- Influence of the move toward generalised provision of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in marginalising aspects of the more elusive and amorphous aspects of the self
- Correlation between increased levels of political and professional debate and a diminishment of the awareness of the personal presence of both clients and therapists
- Potential bearing of proposed changes to criteria for admission to initial therapy training on an acknowledgement of the personal qualities of trainees
- Personal demands of retaining an appropriate level of professional presence within increasingly political and finance driven environments

Further research within this realm might support the development of an increasingly critical understanding of the reality of presence within counselling and psychotherapy. The more we are able to understand, the more perhaps we may develop the capacity to offer one of the most profound aspects of the therapeutic encounter regardless, it would seem, of theoretical or philosophical allegiance. Future studies might therefore be advised to strive to ascertain the reality of therapeutic presence for clients; how they might be impacted by the 'bodily

receptivity', 'transparency', or 'energetic awareness' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 81) of the counsellor, and how they might also be attuned to their own presence within the encounter. It would also appear highly pertinent to attend to what might be appositely termed the shadow side of presence, wherein our 'being with' may be experienced or interpreted as intrusive or manipulative for, as Thorne clearly advises, 'accurate empathy combined with a tender responsiveness can be a seductive brew' (2002: 72).

It has become my belief that our presence emerges from our essential selves and is therefore communicated from the most fundamental places of our humanity. However, the potential for intrusion, coercion or abuse clearly remains, and this is surely both the mystery and the responsibility of the same. Within the latter stages of my research process, I recognised how the quality of my presence was changing, I was becoming more intensively present; attending more freely to the quality of the air between myself and my clients (Webster, 1998) and the spiritual or psychological reverberations (Josselson, 1996) apparent within the moment of our meeting. I became more spontaneous, often responding with greater congruence and increasingly accurate empathy. I found myself experiencing a greater depth of compassion, tenderness and love, and yet also a heightened sense of pain, vulnerability and fear.

'In order to facilitate a shared experience…a radical openness and attunement to others is required' assert MacCallum Sullivan & Goldenberg (2003: 19), and yet what might such 'radical openness' demand of us? Does the appropriate communication of our authentic personal and professional presence necessarily compel us beyond the known; abandoning ourselves to the dangerousness of true encounter with its attendant mystery, fear and instability? Professional competence and personal congruence surely remain central and yet, above all, the capacity to live, experience and celebrate our humanity as openly, authentically and compassionately as we can. Offering without demand, loving without intrusion, holding without suffocation; a 'fragile world' indeed.

And is this what true presence demands of us?
The capacity to sit with pain
To tolerate intimacy,
However incompletely
To be held in moments unbounded
Pouring through time
Yet constrained by our humanity
For what remains unknown, unresolved, unlived
For time passed and potential unrealised
This all, held with me
Within me
As I strive to accompany
To be open to the mystery, beauty and challenge of being
And in doing so cannot but acknowledge my own
Pain tears at me
Loss, fear, vulnerability
Peace, hope, compassion

My silence holds,
Deepens
and in such moments
I become acutely aware of my vulnerability
and the reality of Grace.

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Appendix

I include herein certain extracts from the personal journal I maintained throughout the heuristic process of this research. Holding the synthesis of literature-based and heuristic research was uniquely demanding and I believe that these extracts offer a more comprehensive insight into the authenticity of my process.

Increasingly elusive
Disturbing
The more I allow this to take root in me
The more I feel lost in its depths
I believed I could offer this
'Be this'
What illusions have I been holding?

What is this?
That demands my attention
That draws me
Challenging all attempts to fix, to objectify.
To understand.
Captured in one moment
Dissipated the next
Solid yet transient in its fragility
Greater than my capacity to understand
Timeless, formless, boundless
Demanding I awaken,
Compelling me to attend.

Held in the intimate.
A paradox.
Compelling me to listen
Falling still
A void, an emptiness, a silence
We create, and co-create
A new emergence,
A new reality
Present.

October 2006

Frequently I feel so fearful of the depths we plunge and the precariousness of our humanity. Often caught by the pain and the senselessness, and wonder at it all…My openness to my own being surely equips me to be present with my clients, and I sense the fundamental challenge of this, for being with someone in such openness can be an overwhelming experience perhaps. To what degree do my clients become part of my world, and what impact might that be having on my relationships beyond my practice? Our 'being with' can surely hold so much, can I immerse myself enough in this I wonder?

A compassionate presence? How might that be? Alone in the presence of another? By affirming one another do we become more acutely aware of our uniqueness, our presence?

How can I remain self-aware enough to keep learning, keep critically aware, keep moving, and yet as I write, I sense that this one 'natural' place may automatically reveal new depths, different learning, may point beyond itself maybe. This feels very coherent, integrated and solid, but how open am I to challenging it? How prepared am I to embrace different aspects and perspectives? How integrated do I feel? Evolving a nature of its own, enabling a newness to emerge, inviting a response…or does this depend upon my clients? How are we truly present in our potential striving for non-directivity? Is that an impossibility?

November 2006

This process is already awakening in me a depth that hitherto has remained uncharted. I feel afraid, sobered, alone and most terribly apart from all around me. I hear their voices but my heart, my mind is elsewhere. It is with my pain, yes, it is also with the pain of my clients. I am questioning the precarious safety of life…I sense a vast realm opening before me, a rawness with reality, shadows. I hurt here. I question my capacity to counsel, to 'be' at these levels. What is it then my presence, or my being present within these shadows that may allow a more

present awareness with clients? Or do I deceive myself that we ever can be? This draws me, disturbs, struck by my reality here. Is this what presence means? Is it essentially our capacity to be with our own anxiety, pain, fear, a pre-requisite to being more fully present with another? Is this authenticity, congruence, genuineness?

November 2006

> 'Men need a purpose which bears on eternity'
>
> (Polanyi, 1966: 92)

So why do I stay in this place? Why counsel? What is it within me that seeks to be with others in this place…at this level? What emerges that may touch on the eternal? How in touch with our aloneness, our finiteness, must we be? Do we need to keep accessing a sense of the un-known in ourselves…in others? How thin is the boundary between life and death and how present is it possible to be within our recognition of our mortality? How present is it possible for me to be with my clients who face the very immediate reality of their death? How do I attend here? I glimpse the beyondness in being, the spirit in all things. Our sensing of another within the moment of encounter not only holds the potential for what will be, I also believe it holds the reflection of all we have been, Thus my depression is held here, as is my illness and closeness to death, my struggle to hold aspects of the spiritual, of despair, hope, longing, my unique 'existential touchstones' perhaps. They become integral to my being with another, as theirs with me perhaps. I touch my depths that I might 'meet my clients in theirs' (Mearns & Cooper, 2005: 137/8).

Is our congruence and perhaps our empathy, or the capacity to communicate both, essentially the communication of the depth of our presence with another? I feel more present with my clients, or perhaps more acutely aware when I am not. I feel I am listening more attentively to myself here, hearing another beyond the words, this process is already affecting my practice deeply and I question my capacity to hold.

December 2006

What is person-centredness…what am I doing? Can I stand back from my process enough to be as fully present as I may need to be?

> 'Maybe a small change is enough, making the most of living with what is rather'
>
> (Atkins & Loewenthal, 2006: 500)

What emerges in the silence when I believe I am being present with? Who am really present with, myself? Another? How do images, dreams and visions impact on my capacity to be present? How subtle might the various manifestations of our presence be? Are we naïve in denying the power and the profundity of these places? Where do these responses come from in me? Today I was responding from a dry place in myself, resonating, echoing hers, but it changed, warmth and softness emerged…this transformed the moment of our encounter I believe, but for whom I wonder?

I feel 'still' today, but aware how quickly it can disappear, I want to hold this, for her and for myself. I long to stay empathic, and I feel the depth of my congruence. I want to embody this more…to be connected enough, and to hear, truly hear.

Do I have to be more acutely aware of my own aloneness if I am to be fully present to another? Where does my listening and my holding emerge from? Feelings of isolation, remoteness, strangeness…what is happening in these moments? To me, to the Other? Do I cease to be truly present the moment I step out of your world and become aware of mine? Is it possible to hold both concurrently and without compromise? Can we hold a sense of immanence *and* transcendence? What does this all touch within my history, can I be objective here? Who is it who is really hurting? What do clients sense when the presence of the counsellor can be so loud?

Something important would seem to emerge then within the reality of our aloneness and the

power and potential of connection. What is it about my uniqueness that enables me to hear and to hold you in yours? Is it purely the connection itself, or does it perhaps emerge form a fundamental, yet unvoiced and unrecognised sense of our humanity? The very fact of our existential aloneness (Cooper, 2003), lends to our encounters a depth, poignancy, vitality and also perhaps a sadness that otherwise would be denied us.

What communicates itself of my presence? This is challenging and shaking, how exposed are we within the moment of meeting? How quiet can our presence be? How quiet should it be? What impacts far beyond our words, does this need to find a way of being voiced? Does this emerge in our capacity to be present with?

Presence and Aloneness: Who are we truly present with? Does my struggle to accept my fundamental and pervasive sense of aloneness actually free me to hear this in others? What might it allow to emerge? What might it restrict? How present am I with my true self in the counselling relationship, how aware of our true selves can we be anyway?

March 2007

> 'The therapist must put herself aside whilst offering her presence to the client. This presence comes through the surrender, through the therapist's dedication to the client's unique way of being'
>
> (Bozarth & Wilkins, 2001: 153)

Do I put myself aside to offer my presence, or is my presence my 'self' in its fullest form? I may put aside my concerns, agendas, training, expectations…but myself?? That is surely how I am present. And this surely is not something I do alone, this is emerging powerfully, my presence may not be able to be received, or may be too powerful, 'surrendering' might be too much perhaps. Do we attend to this enough in training I wonder? Do I attend to it enough? Is this intrusive, controlling, coercive? This is delicate, fragile, or is this simply my perception of it, is it fragility I am hearing? Am I colluding with my clients here? Am I fearful of their vulnerability and seek to disguise my boundaries, my remoteness as ethical practice?

Encounter is inherently fluid and this challenges my desire for holding and containment…My presence is surely heard differently by each of my clients as I in turn hear each of them differently. My expansion or contraction (Cameron, 2002, 2004) is surely in response to the presence of the Other. As I strive to offer my presence to my clients, what is it really I communicate? How might I be received?

March 2007

> 'So therapists need to be there and have a presence…this is not about being skilful but really being brave'
>
> (Baker et al, 2006: 15)

What is happening to my presence at the moment? I have become so practiced at slipping behind the shell, sometimes I can be reached beyond it, and this is powerful...but often I can't, and this leaves me feeling remote, alone, numb…it also frightens me. I can live simultaneously at so many levels, it gives me an immense capacity to hold turbulence whilst communicating stability, and yet it removes me from people and places. My feeling sense can become so very far away from my capacity to touch, encounter and meet, I am weary of this, what is so very fearful for me in becoming more present?

I find that each time I feel drawn to a glimpse or an understanding of my research focus, once I become absorbed by it, then it suddenly becomes 'not enough' and I need to move on again. I find new senses emerging and I can no longer stay where I am. This concerns me; will I ever be able to hold this? Emotionally, psychologically, intellectually? Is this essentially the nature of the research journey, perhaps the heuristic nature of my journey? What is my heart telling me to do? Can I listen here? Can I hear?

Currently it all feels an illusion, and I seem to fail constantly and consistently to be what I want to be, to offer what I hope to offer to my clients. I feel wrung out, empty and terribly alone, a pervasive sense of impoverishment. I find myself struggling to hold coherence within

such ambiguity. I feel I have been trapped in such a single mode of vision, what described my story for so long leaves me searching for another meaning, another way of living, being, interpreting the world. I know I am yearning to retreat, to find space, to re-connect…how can I even begin to explore presence when feel so desperately remote? I feel in a boundary place, on the edge of two worlds but belonging to neither. I feel lost, alone and very, very tired and wondering at the extent of my journey and the degree of my fall.

What is this place? How does this study of presence move me to a recognition of the reality of the presences of those around me? How do I understand a new way of being? How do I hear what is being revealed? Something about holding this, realising I am here, attending to it. Moving from that more distant awareness of presence, the undercurrent of stillness, to a more present awareness, of being. Images that had once been part of my dreams, unfocused, distant and remote, are now very alive, very real, very focused. I am acutely aware of emerging and engaging, to 'be there' as fully as I can be, and yet I do not know the language of this place, there are no words to describe it or, it seems, to hold me within it. There is a wholeness to this, an awakening…

April 2007

> 'Systematic qualitative inquiry into one's practice can result in a different kind of listening and therefore a different kind of counselling than occurs without this self-examination'
>
> (Morrow, 2007: 228)

Increased levels of self awareness, how is my presence perceived? How do I perceive the presences of others? What had been felt as a void is now experienced as inner spaciousness, there is 'room' in me for this process, a personal longing for more intimacy in relationships; more presence perhaps. Enhanced awareness of life flowing through me, not something I do or hold. Yet an awareness of the risk of this place, of immediacy, transparency, closer connection. Greater awareness of my personal impact, my presence. Frighteningly real, I

struggle with my sense of my 'self' in relationship, all too aware of my propensity to retreat into silence; to protect myself, aware that this research is increasingly becoming a very effective way for me to 'hide', and I wonder at this impact this is having on my relationships.

Enhanced awareness of clients, and the demands of holding my presence whilst being open and responsive to theirs. It cannot surely be coincidence that I am about to participate I an encounter weekend, of which I am both excited and fearful. It is a desire to be present at depth, that life can feel so shallow certainly impoverished without it. And yet this is a very new way of being present this is an awareness of how our presence react can respond to one another this is not hiding, not wanting to be rescued, and I sense it holds the potential to transform not only my research but, importantly, my practice. Awareness to being open to presence demands perhaps far more than I realised, that the challenge of it, the level of exposure, what I hear of myself when I do not anaesthetise myself to the unwanted in my experience is shaking, disturbing…demands a response, it is not enough simply to hear.

April 2007

Suddenly realising this is the first time I have been as acutely present with myself, really present within the moment, and perhaps this is fundamental to my processing presence, that it is, paradoxically, demanding a level of aloneness. I sense currently no-one will be able to give me what I feel I need, so inevitably therefore, my journey 'within' will have to be enough. Is it enough though? Can it ever be? Suddenly in such a different place, and I struggle with the concrete reality of the everyday, and the tension of wanting to be lost or immersed in my process. Presence is awakening my presence, or my lack of it, my awareness of others also at many levels, my desire to be present within my spirituality. I feel both terribly full and yet profoundly empty, and exceptionally tired.

Suddenly and powerfully struck by the privilege and the enormity of encounter, all that my

clients pour out to me and my longing to hear and be present to them more fully. This is for supervision, this sense of seeing 'through a glass darkly' and longing to see with greater clarity, more fluidity, more freedom. Abandonment to process feels right but so frightening and yet if I stay restrained what is happening to both process and relationship?

June 2007

I have a sense of the significance of my spirit and my openness to my spirituality however envisaged…how can we 'be there' I wonder, ethically, appropriately, lovingly…how can I hold the pain without retreating, how can I not lose myself in professionalism whilst remaining professional? My sense of my own spirit has changed so much, I feel I have faced an aloneness barely contemplated before and I am in the process of emerging…different, fearful, sad…what is this 'one life' and how do I live it more fully and more lovingly?

How may I be with my clients in their fullness and how do I hear myself appropriately with them, especially when I am afraid? Can I do this I wonder? Am I competent? Am I seeing this more a spiritual accompaniment now? I surely haven't travelled this far and struggled this much to have to let go of it all. What is vocation and how do we truly live it?

July 2007

I have a sense that the past weeks have thrown me into a very new dimension, one of fear and maturity, one wherein rescue might not come and I am left wondering at the wisdom of decisions have made…I feel bigger, heavier, more sombre (if indeed that were possible) and suddenly struck by the sense that I want to be giving, giving, giving…in right and ethical and loving ways. For my writing and my counselling to reflect that love, to reflect mystery, silence, spirit and pain, struggle and presence.

Suddenly after supervision, overwhelmed with the enormity of all this. It is as if I have let it

all in at a much more profound level, and I am left struggling to comprehend its enormity. I do not feel worthy of this but I am here and am not going to walk away…it is impossible for me to retreat. How dare we be here, in these most profound, precious and intimate places and then speak of frameworks and codes and curricula? Is this not, in essence, Love? Can we be trained for it? How then do we offer safe, ethical, appropriate, boundaried practice that still holds the passion, the care, the sensitivity, the love? And, yes, to do this I do need a degree of spiritual attunement to myself…does my opening to the possibility of profound meeting necessarily become body, mind, and spirit? Am I losing a sense of rigidity here? Where is my fluidity? Being present...is that enough?

Am I really with my clients at the moment I wonder, and who am I present with? Am I there as therapist, nurturer, mother, child, protector…with my competence, vulnerability, pain, freedom, limitations? What aspects of my self emerge in response to my clients then, and do I really notice them when they do? I find myself increasingly present, and recognising the tension of this. Can I fall with my clients and not know when the falling will cease?

July 2007

What is therapeutic love as opposed to other forms of loving? What is therapeutic presence as opposed to other levels of presence? How attuned am I to the difference?

> 'One cannot 'will' this sort of meeting; one can only be intently open to the possibility'
>
> (MacCallum Sullivan & Goldenberg, 2003: 68)

An abandonment to process perhaps…or do we necessarily hold much more firmly than this? How might I become more 'intently open' to the possibility of this depth of meeting…is this presence at its most full, fluid, frightening? What might be stopping me? Am I in danger of becoming lost in all of this, surely impossible to analyse, where am I going? Why? Is my writing keeping me from others, or releasing me more completely into their presence?

> 'What is it like for you, the client, to be as you are being in my presence? What is it like for me, the therapist, to be in the presence of this other?'
>
> (Spinelli, 2007: 13)

How might my clients feel in my presence? How is it possible to tell? How might I be directing, coercing, abusing? How subtle and silent are these processes, how inevitable? How am I experienced when I retreat? When I am struggling myself? When I am unwell? How do we hold and hold on within a process of such challenge, such mystery, untidiness, complexity, incompleteness? This deeply challenges my capacity to 'be' in the space between.

August 2007

The intensity of presence moves me. Do I have the intellectual and emotional stamina to complete this process? Questioning too what is happening to my practice…to my relationships with family, friends, colleagues, how is this impacting me? I sense the more I immerse myself in the data, the more I retreat from those around me. I am becoming increasingly present to myself, but distant from others. Where are my clients in this?

Do we ever have any control over what is 'brought into the relationship' (Rogers in Moustakas, 1990: 107) at a fundamental level? Is it present because I am? What we have journeyed communicates itself perhaps, becomes a 'vital element in what [unfolds] between us' (Vickers, 2006: 275).

September 2007

> 'I realised that until I felt my inner limits expand I could not see because I was not present…like a child in my need, did I surround myself with the comfort of the gentle hills in order to eventually bring myself to the still point within, so I could begin to be present?'
>
> (Witte-Townsend & Di Giulio, 2004: 140/1)

Where am I when I am not present…how does my being change? Have we control over this I wonder, how easy is it for us to retreat? How do I fail to perceive you in your presence? I am

questioning how much presence really demands of me, and if we have to be fully present ourselves if we are truly to comprehend the presence of another…At times, at the moment, it feels I am remote and removed, almost anaesthetised to my surroundings, deeply aware of a 'nearness out of reach' (Steiner, 1989). I am struggling with a sense of space, void, emptiness, recognising new aspects of my 'self' and my spirituality. What do I need to do now? How does presence reveal itself to me now? I fear complete isolation, is this what the research process demands of is, should it? Where am I, and who, fundamentally, am I with? The 'still point', this for me is where presence may manifest itself, when I am truly and fully present to, and with myself, and yet is this possible? Then, and only when I am fundamentally 'still' do I have the capacity to even begin to be appropriately present with another. Clearing the way for presence therefore, consciously letting myself drop into it, sensing the spaciousness of it and the challenge of it, 'becoming one' with it perhaps (Moustakas, 1990: 16).

October 2007

I become acutely aware of my striving for tenderness, the quality of being there and becoming attuned to the presence of my client. I felt the fragility of her, the sadness, tears and fear, but my tears were withheld, too much for this encounter perhaps. I felt the tension between her distance and her apparent need for holding. Too frightened to let go into this process, a dissolving of barriers between us, she has my psychological 'holding' and yet I am aware that my presence may be too strong for her at the moment…did I withdraw? Unaware, within the moment, of the extent of my presence with her…I could not have stepped back from the immediacy or the rawness of those moments, all consuming and so very vivid.

And yet I was sufficiently with myself to hold my sense of the feeling of that place with her. I did not fall into it all as deeply or as fully as she did…or perhaps as I might have done…was I a holding presence? Did I need to be this for her, or did I need that holding for me I wonder? How might I continue to accompany her enough, within this most frightening of places, that

she might feel safe enough to journey this part of her life. Aware that the sadness that seems to accompany me so much of the time is very pervasive at the moment. Questioning my role in these places, and my heightened awareness of my own capacity for presence, this has become so much more complex, so demanding. I was not expecting to emerge with such a sense of the potentially damaging power of our presence with our clients, that our presence might hold the potential for both healing and harm, I have heard differently, more fully perhaps, I feel acutely aware of my 'insufficiency' (Buber, 1958: 131).

…….